

CHRISTIANE ROCHEFORT AND THE DIALOGIC:  
VOICES OF TENSION AND INTENTION

BY  
PAMELA FRIES PAINE

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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Pamela Fries Paine

Dedicated in loving appreciation to my husband, James Robert Paine, for all the many months of patience, encouragement, determined optimism, and financial support, that permitted the successful completion of this ambitious project.

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Pamela Fries Paine

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This dissertation examines the novelistic fiction of 20th-century French writer Christiane Rochefort. Its thesis is that an understanding of the presence and functioning of voice in Rochefort's narrative is essential to discerning meaning in her texts and to appreciating the complexity and subtlety of her art. Although Rochefort has not yet been deemed a major writer, one as important as Sarraute or Duras, for example, this analysis originates in a conviction that her work merits more study and recognition. While literary prizes distinguish her early fiction as thematically significant, a relative paucity of published scholarly analysis referencing her later work further motivated the present research.

This dissertation extends the existing body of critical analysis surrounding Rochefort's fiction and points out that, in addition to the thematic interest of her work, the complexity of her narrative technique brings important contributions to the

artistic development of the novel as a genre. In particular, by close examination of voice in her novels one can deconstruct verbal masks and subtle manifestations of multiple consciousness among diverse social speech types and heterogeneous perspectives.

Voice is an essential structural element that Rochefort applied in her writing. The introduction provides an overview of the critical question of voice by defining terms and outlining major contributions to its theory. Noting that Rochefort's fiction is compatible with Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the novel as the artistic organization of diverse individual voices and social speech types, this study draws particular support from Bakhtinian theory and terminology. Both novelist and theorist envision the novel as a dialogic and polyphonic complex of voices within a social, historical, and cultural context. This analysis demonstrates that, in fact, Rochefort's personal vision and individual artistry reside in the refined, transformed and reconstituted fictional representation of the language, attitudes, tensions, and intentions discernable within the dialogic interaction of her fictional narrators and characters.

This study divides Rochefort's fictional work into three periods in order to differentiate her novels both thematically and stylistically. Close reading of the novels in each group, with particular focus on the functioning of voice, offers a new approach to the writer's fiction. This study also provides scholarly analysis of several texts that have, until now, remained obscure, misunderstood, and unappreciated.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE THEORETICAL QUESTION OF VOICE IN LITERATURE

“Et l’écriture n’est-ce pas une conversation?  
(Christiane Rochefort, *Conversations sans paroles*, 25)

Voices of all kinds resonate in both prose and poetry: voices of characters, narrators, and authors; voices of history, society and other literature; voices quoted, mimicked, parodied and paraphrased. Voice has long been an important consideration in the appreciation and analysis of literature. As a critical concept, the notion of voice has had varied and inconsistent usage. The term has been used to differentiate among characters speaking, narrators recounting, and even authors’ styles. Generally speaking, voice has been used as a metonym for the human presence evoked through the reading of a poem or story. Often representing a consciousness asserting itself into that of others, voice can figure importantly in the formulation of identity or, in modern theoretical terms, of subjectivity.

The desire to have a voice, to claim the dominant position of speaking subject has been not only a prominent theme in much of twentieth-century literature, but a motivation for many of the century’s numerous writers. To gain a voice is to become empowered symbolically. The centrality of voice in literature is evidenced by the number of questions appurtenant to narratology in general that the issue of voice inevitably raises (such as intention, point of view, rhetoric, reception, time, place, truth, reliability, and authority, for example). Christiane Rochefort’s novelistic



fiction foregrounds the interplay of multiple voices whose dialogic interaction forms the basis for the creation of narrative tension and interest in her novels. Her work, then, is ideally suited for analysis through a study of the presence and function of those fictional voices.

Recognizing voice as an essential structural element that Christiane Rochefort has highlighted in her writing, the following chapters explore its different manifestations in her work and attempt to determine its nature and functioning. The objective of the study is to identify categories of voice present in Rochefort's writing and to discover the tensions and intentionalities inherent in those voices that, through their dialogic interfacing, contribute to levels of meaning immanent in her narrative.

Literature, often the site of a discourse of opposition, can function to increase awareness of those minor forces and voices operating paradoxically within the dominant. Rochefort's keen interest in the subversive potential of language, combined with her attention to marginalized individuals and groups, makes her narrative fiction especially appropriate for an in-depth study of some of those insistent voices which, by their tenacious determination to be heard, may spark future social, political, and artistic change. The challenge for the reader then lies in careful reading and analysis of the discourse that is being used. As Michel Foucault aptly stated, "the question is ultimately: what was said in what was being said?" (*Archaeology of Knowledge*, 40).

Figuring prominently and controversially among the considerable number of women writing and publishing in the latter half of the twentieth century, Christiane Rochefort has left a legacy of complex and challenging texts that merit attention both

for her stylistics and for her treatment of theme. Despite prizes of distinction awarded to her work by various French literary agencies, and despite growing interest in her early books as a point of departure for French cultural studies, Rochefort's artistic contribution remains largely unappreciated. The examination of her work in this study focuses on narrative technique with particular attention to the treatment and significance of voice in her writing project and, in turn, the contribution of her work to the French literary canon.

Although theories of voice may be studied from a psychological perspective, I chose to focus my analysis on narratological issues, particularly the notion of voice as conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin. Specifically, attention is given to the plurality or layering of voice, its socially-coded nature, and its dialogic functioning within the text.

Because of the numerous scholars who have contributed to explaining the complexities of narratology in fictional writing, a highly specialized lexicon has evolved. Before beginning the examination of voice in Christiane Rochefort's fiction, it would be useful, then, to review the development of the concept of voice as a narratological device in order to clarify and position terms to be used in the course of the discussion.

As a category in poetics, the concept of voice has its roots in classical Greek aesthetics. In *The Republic*, Socrates uses the terms *diegesis* and *mimesis* to distinguish whether the poet is speaking in his own voice, is imitating the voice of another, or is mixing the two modes. *Mimesis* refers to the imitation or quoting of speech, whereas *diegesis* refers to direct recounting or telling of the narrative.

Discourse, then, that can be attributed to the writer is diegetic discourse, and that which s/he attributes to someone else is mimetic. Mimetic discourse is, in a sense, a blend of voices. Although the speaker is assumed to be another, the writer is still at the origin of that voice as its scriptor. In other words, the writer takes on a pose as the origin of the voice and transcribes it.

Later, Aristotle expanded the notion of *mimesis* to include both simple narration and imitation. For him, all narrative was imitation; the distinction was merely a matter of degree. Most important in Aristotle's argument was not the illusion of speech or whether the author spoke in his own voice or that of another, but rather the degree of imitation (*Poetics* 1448). Whether a voice discernable in poetry or other narrative can be recognized as that of the poet/narrator talking to himself (or to nobody in particular), as that of the poet/narrator addressing an intended audience, or as that of a dramatic character he has created, speech is presumed to be the originating discourse of which the written version is essentially a script or recording. The point, then, is the success of the written mimicry in creating the *illusion* of that speaking voice.

As a term in literary theory, voice touches on a whole range of questions concerning human presence in written narrative. The range includes questions of intent; of origin; of relationships; of personalities; of point of view; of cultural, historical and political influences; of reality and fantasy; and, ultimately, of meaning. For many critics, voice has meant authorial distinctiveness or personality. The long evolution in critical analysis of literature was concerned with determining the author's private opinions and nature, which would tend to individualize or

characterize his writing. Some have felt that an author's voice, like his fingerprints, can be discerned as an identifying mechanism, even through the static of fictional events and characters. For others, an analysis of voice is a means of perceiving possible verbal masks the author may don for his dramatic textual performance.

For structuralists, the word "voice" and its personal implications often are avoided in favor of definitions or notions of text and intertextuality. These critics seek to disengage voice from the expressive individual consciousness. Structuralist theories do not situate the human presence within a work in the figure of the author, real or implied, nor do they see voice as a disembodied authorial mask. For them, every individual text is traversed by other, prior texts as fields of discourse that criss-cross within it. Julia Kristeva suggests, for example, that "the novel, seen as a text, is a semiotic practice in which the synthesized patterns of several utterances can be read" (*Desire in Language*, 37). Roland Barthes sees the notion of voice as linguistic, defining the grammatical relationship between the subject of an utterance and the action indicated by the verb (*S/Z*, 20-21).

For Gérard Genette, a structuralist whose particular influence was in the area of narratology, voice does not define a medium of utterance, but rather a set of relationships. These relationships exist among implied or actual narrators and among diegetic levels of the fiction's discourse that are distributed along a continuum: that of the time of narration. From these relationships, Genette derived subtle and elaborate configurations of narrative that do not necessitate identifying an author's (or implied author's) assumed presence behind voice. He also expanded the distinction between diegesis and mimesis to define a series of narrative levels such

as: *extradiégétique* (in which the narrator of the story does not figure in the diegesis), *inradiégétique* (in which the narrator also figures as a character in the diegesis), *métadiégétique* (in which there is a narrator whose story is embodied within another narrative), and *autodiégétique* (a first person narrative the narrator of which is also the protagonist or the hero). Because of the complex possibilities regarding the relation of the *narrateur* to the text that he is recounting, for Genette, the narrating voice is determined basically by two criteria: its relation to the diegesis (absent or present) as well as by its level or distance (expressed as first-person, *homo*, or as third person, *hétéro*). Genette further distinguishes what he refers to as the *narrataire* or the one who listens to or receives the narrating voice. Generally speaking, he insists that both *narrateur* and *narrataire* are at the same level of the narration. That is to say, “le narrateur extradiégétique ne peut viser qu’un narrataire extradiégétique” (*Figures III*, 266), or the external narrator necessarily addresses his voice to an external listener. For Genette, no voice can be isolated but must be considered in its interaction with others to whom it is addressed, whether or not those others are given the occasion to respond verbally within the text of the narration.

Like structuralist concepts, poststructuralist thought also disengages voice from person, but offers no formal structure as substitute. Jacques Derrida, for example, in *Positions*, sees voice as part of the logocentrism of Western philosophy that must be challenged. He argues that voice no more equals or expresses an origin than does any other manifest sign. For him, all discourse, and all signs, are traces deposited in the play of *différance*. In Derridean poetics, any author or speaker discerned in a work is a construction. Contrary to Plato’s conception of fictional

discourse imitating a prior and truer reality, there is no "reality" to be imitated. Representation is its own reality. Both voice and speaker derive from the play of language, therefore, both are *traces* rather than sources or origins. Language takes on a life of its own and becomes just another participant in the text; it is not simply a tool used by a voice to express the reality of a thought or event. Because her texts confront the issue of language and represent its controlling function and embedded ideologies, the scope of this study necessarily includes a discussion of Rochefort's use of language in character depiction and of the voices of the characters themselves as they struggle against the power of language to influence their lives.

Since the 1970s, writings of theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have attempted to recognize and valorize the feminine voice in written narrative. Their arguments, aided by new psychoanalytic theories, focused on determining the positions from which women have been allowed to speak as well as the nature of representations of the feminine in literature. For these theorists, the question of femininity merges with other important questions of language, power and subjectivity, as well as those of gender. Irigaray for example, in *Speculum de l'autre femme*, argues that subjectivity is always positioned in the male, leaving the female as merely a mirror image or object of the masculine gaze. For Irigaray, masculine or phallic ideology underpins all Western discourse. She writes that,

man has been the subject of discourse: theological, moral, political.  
And the gender of God, guarantor of every subject and of all  
discourse, is always masculine-paternal in the West. (*L'Éthique*, 14)

As for woman, Irigaray insists that: "If the woman traditionally, and as mother, represents *place* for man, the limit signifies that she becomes a *thing*, with some

possible mutations from one epoch to another. She finds herself hemmed off as a thing"(17). As this study points out, although Rochefort distanced herself from the feminist movement in later years, her early novels, *Le Repos du guerrier*, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, and *Les Stances à Sophie*, all clearly articulate feminist concerns. Feminist ideology gains a voice in her early fiction, particularly Irigaray's notion of phallogocentric discourse.

The insistence of these theoreticians on the value of "feminine" traits further led them to theorize a mode of female writing characterized by a focus on the mother and the maternal voice. Their work led to a widespread movement in the latter half of the twentieth century to subvert phallogocentric discourse by valorizing the maternal and exploring feminine difference. In Cixous' writings, the theme of the maternal breast and voice dominates. The maternal voice is the *langelait*, a metaphor for the mother who writes with the milk of her breast. Cixous, with her theories on the primarily feminine nature of the voice, contributed to privileging its role within the realm of narrative technique. Debate continues among critics, however, particularly among American feminists and gender theorists, who see Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* as normative and essentialist.

Rochefort personally denied the concept of *écriture féminine* and did not hesitate to speak out publicly against it. Although Rochefort's texts undeniably give voice to female concerns and offer a view of society from a woman's perspective, her texts do not focus on the female body nor do they use it as a point of departure for linguistic expression, novelistic structure, character development, or psychological exploration. In her novels, the issue of gender is secondary to the issue

of individuality. As a human, a woman, and an activist, Rochefort spoke out personally on many occasions to protest what she perceived as inequities and injustices in France and in the world, particularly as they affected the lives of individuals. Any form of oppression, suppression or marginalization drew her attention and inspired her pen. Mention of the female voice or feminist issues then is certainly appropriate in any discussion of voice in Rochefort's texts. In my analysis, the discussion centering on the female voice will be limited to a recognition within Rochefort's narrative of ideological issues specific to the feminist movement that interface with existing patriarchal paradigms, and to an examination of the language and/or discourse of female characters and narrators whose textual voices articulate those issues.

As already suggested, the concept of voice in literature extends beyond that of a single individual. From a broader, cultural perspective, "voice" can signal the collection of ideologically derived identities that manifest themselves in fictional discourse, gathering all the historical, cultural, and discursive currents that flow through the author, the narrator or the character. It is, in fact, because of accessibility to those currents provided by Rochefort's texts that her novels have found their way onto reading lists for many Cultural Studies courses in American colleges and universities. Perhaps most useful in understanding the role of voice in this regard is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel as a complex web of many voices.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) work, devoted to Dostoevsky, Rabelais, and the novel form in particular, inspired investigations into problems of language in narrative and had a significant impact on a range of disciplines in the humanities.



Tzvetan Todorov declared him "the most important Soviet thinker in the human sciences and the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century" (*Mikhail Bakhtin*, ix).<sup>1</sup>

For Bakhtin, the concept of voice in prose fiction is inherently a culturally contingent mix within the fiction's discourse and constitutive of that discourse. Each voice has its own will, point of view, and consciousness, though its singularity is not so much personal as ideological. In other words, speech exists within historical, social, and cultural *context*; it belongs to the social order and not merely to the individual.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin defines the novel as a "heteroglossic" genre; that is, a mode of discourse composed of many voices or languages in dialogical relationship to each other. (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 265-7) The term "heteroglossia" refers broadly to the existence of multiple languages or voices that come together, in different ways, for different purposes and with different results within the context of written narrative. As Bakhtin explains,

the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre [is that] the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language. (332)

The conflict resulting from this interplay of differing individual voices creates tension, interest, and meaning in the novel.

Heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin, manifests itself at several levels: at the level of the text as it relates to other texts; at the level of the multiple voices in dialogue with one another within the text; and at the level of the various voices that

may be present simultaneously in the speech of a single character within the text. The first instance refers to Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. This may be noted, for example, in the homogeneous style of the work and the other dominant styles of the period, or in its affinity to the style and/or content of any other period. At the second level, Bakhtin outlines five basic types of compositional and stylistic unities into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down: direct authorial narration, stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration, stylization of the various forms of semi-literary narration, various forms of literary authorial speech (moral, philosophic, scientific, oratory, memoranda), and the stylistically individualized speech of the characters. ("Discourse in the Novel," *DI*, 261) The stylistic uniqueness of the novel consists in the combination of these. It is at the third level, involving the speech of the various characters within the novel, that the movement of the themes takes place. As Bakhtin explains,

the novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. (263)

For him, the novel can be defined as "a diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized." (262)

Another aspect of heteroglossia that can be useful in understanding narrative is its functioning within the authorial or narrative voice. The prose writer uses and accents words, taking advantage of their heteroglot nature. Words function for the writer as objects, "speech-things" that he arranges and exhibits as narrative. As he goes through the process of creating the speech utterances of the various characters, including that of his narrator, often one voice becomes inflected by another. As

mentioned earlier during the discussion of mimetic discourse, although the speaking character is assumed to be an individual apart from the writer of the fiction, the author is still at the origin of that voice as its creator. Bakhtin explains that the result is one person's speech,

in another's language serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. ("Discourse in the Novel," *DI* 324)

In his *Discourse Typology in Prose*, Bakhtin attempts to furnish, at length and in detail, a differentiation of the effects of this phenomenon of double voicing as it occurs in stylization, parody and dialogue. He states that

the ultimate conceptual authority (the author's intention) is brought out, not in the author's direct speech, but by manipulating the utterances of another addresser, utterances intentionally created and deployed as belonging to someone other than the author. (as cited in Lambropoulos, 288)

He further points out that an author may use the speech act of another

in pursuit of his own aims and in such a way as to impose a new intention on the utterance, which nevertheless retains its own proper referential intention. . . . Thus, within a single utterance there may occur two intentions, two voices. (289)

Hugh Kenner noticed this phenomenon of double-voicedness taking place in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*, a phenomenon he referred to as the "Uncle Charles Principle." He points to a passage in which Joyce writes that,

every morning, therefore, Uncle Charles repaired to his outhouse but not before he had greased and brushed scrupulously his back hair and brushed and put on his tall hat. (*Joyce's Voices*, 17)

The narrator's use of the word "repaired" is the site of inflection of his own voice by that of the character. It would be Uncle Charles's own word should he chance to say what he was doing. Some of his own characterizing vocabulary creeps in and gives the reader a sense of his personality.

This phenomenon also can occur around a character of the novel, in his speech utterances. Bakhtin refers to these sites as "character zones." Speaking of the character zones, he explains:

the zones are formed from the characters' semi-discourses, from various forms of hidden transmission for the discourse of the other, by the words and expressions scattered in this discourse, and from the irruption of alien expressive elements into authorial discourse (ellipsis, questions, exclamations). Such a zone is the range of action of the character's voice, intermingling in one way or another with the author's voice. ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," *DI* 129)

Thus, heteroglossia enters the novel through *speaking* characters. In real life, people talk most of all about what others talk about. They transmit, recall, weigh, pass judgement, agree, disagree, refer to, and so on. As mentioned earlier, according to Bakhtin, "the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre [is that] the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language." (332) What this means is that novels tend to have several centers of authority, typically in conflict with one another. The different voices in the novel represent and disseminate different points of view, different perspectives. Or, when isolated in a single character's speech, they may seem like a dialogue in miniature of conventions, taboos, prescriptions, repressions, and authorities coming from some exterior source.

Although much of the discussion in this study centers attention on the discourse of speaking characters within the diegesis, the analysis is not limited to the concept of voice as it pertains to that of speaking characters only. Other, more abstract entities also can function as a voice within the text. Abstractions that seem particularly pertinent to Rochefort's novelistic fiction could include, for example, ideological voices (such as feminist, chauvinist, marxist, or capitalist, for example). In Bakhtinian terms, because the novel is, in a sense, a "system of languages," the action that takes place on the surface is only one level of the total action to be found within its pages. Below the surface level of events, or even of explicit statements, is the level of ideological action. Other impersonal voices entering the cacophony arise out of cultural contexts (such as intertextual allusions and citations, metatextual commentary, and instruments or influences of popular culture). Even language itself, through selective vocabulary, evidences of tone, ellipses, and even constructions of syntax, can "speak" about the person or the aesthetic from which it issues.

Bakhtin compared the study of the novel to the study of modern languages. His idea was that both are in the process of continual development. Like languages, the novel as a genre has always and will always adapt to what Bakhtin calls its chronotope. By that he means its particular configuration of time and place. Speaking of the chronotope, Bakhtin remarks, "We will understand the chronotope as a literary category of form-and-content." (235) Just as the character is understood in relation to the work of literature, the work must be understood in relation to the whole of literature. For Bakhtin, chronotope can be understood as genre which, for

him, can be determined only by consideration of the two fundamental categories of every imaginable universe: space and time. He asserts that,

in literature, the chronotope has an essential *generic* signification. It can be stated categorically that genre and generic species are precisely determined by the chronotope (235).

In his definition, the novel is not to be seen as a single, specific genre, but as a dynamic meta-genre that is, in fact, transformed by these coordinates of time and space. Thus, Bakhtin's theory includes an enumeration of novelistic subgenres determined in large measure by these two factors. He lists as chronotopes, for example, the novels of antiquity, sophistic novels, chivalric romances, baroque novels, pastoral novels, the *Prüfungsroman*, the *Bildungsroman*, the autobiographical novel, the gothic novel, the sentimental novel, the picaresque novel, the parodic novel, and so on. From this list, Bakhtin's conception of literary studies as historically pertinent becomes apparent.

Christiane Rochefort's novels, like those of most modern writers, can often be seen as a blend of some of these earlier chronotopes. Contemporary coordinates and the inevitable incorporation of current social issues and narratological trends combine with already-identified chronotopes to blur former distinctions and contribute to the development of possible new sub-genres and a valorization of hybridity that may be associated with the transformation of the novelistic genre in the twentieth century.

Another important concept that bears directly on an analysis of Rochefort's stylistics and narrative use of voice is the Bakhtinian phenomenon of *carnival* and the voice of laughter arising from the voice of the populace. Bakhtin's discussion of

this voice of the people, in the introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, notes that it serves momentarily to appropriate the forbidden and to abolish hierarchies, privileges, rules, and taboos. Its ambivalent nature, blending voices that express at once light-hearted gaiety and sarcastic mockery, both confirms and denies the world from which it issues. These voices are characterized by a series of phenomena in language: vulgar or obscene words and expressions; blasphemy; insults; images of the body and of bodily functions; and reference to explicit sexual acts, fertility, eating, drinking, defecation, birth, death, and excess in general. What Bakhtin stresses, in his discussion of the function of this laughter of voice of the populace, is its liberating influence. It overcomes fear: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power, and of established norms. What was fearsome becomes grotesque and comic. Further, this voice of the people, by its grotesque laughter serves to push aside convention to insist on a new look at the world and a consideration of other possibilities for existence. As Bakhtin explains, its function is

to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (*Rabelais and His World* 34)

Perhaps it should be noted that Bakhtin's interpretation of the carnival's existence as a means of provoking change was deemed invalid by some. His critics point out that the carnival was created to serve as a release of hostile feelings. The idea was that once these hostilities were released, the world could then return to "normal." In effect then, say the critics, carnival and the laughter of the populace

were a means of preserving the *status quo*. Additionally, Bakhtin's concept was attacked by feminists, who point out the victimization of women in Rabelais' work.

In the case of parody, in essence yet another form of heteroglossia, Bakhtin explains that it introduces into the other's speech an intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, lodged in the speech of the other, clashes antagonistically. Parodic word usage is analogous to ironic use, inevitably resulting in a change of tone--often mocking, exaggerated or derisive. In feminist theory, this appropriation of another's speech is similar also to Luce Irigaray's concept of mimicry in which male discourse is mimicked ironically to point out its bias and reduce or eliminate its insidious but forceful attempt to control.

In his essay, "Discourse Typology in Prose," Bakhtin identifies another type of discourse which, unlike parody or double-voiced discourse, does not use what are distinctly another person's words to express his/her own particular intentions. In this discourse,

the other speech act remains outside the bounds of the author's speech, but is implied or alluded to in that speech. The other speech act is not reproduced with a new intention, but shapes the author's speech while remaining outside its boundaries. Such is the nature of discourse in hidden polemic and equally, as a rule, in a single line of dialogue ("Discourse Typology in Prose" as cited in Lambropoulos, 295).

Continuing, he explains that in everyday speech, instances of internal polemics are 'barbed' words and words used as 'brickbats.' This category also would include any speech that is servile or overblown, any speech that is replete with reservations, concessions, loopholes, and so on.



The concept of heteroglossia further can be understood to function at the level of the text as it relates to other texts--its intertextuality, or what Bakhtin refers to as *dialogism*. As Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, "After Adam, there are no nameless objects nor any unused words. Intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates." (*Michael Bakhtin : the Dialogical Principle*, x) On a very fundamental level, without this quality of dialogism or intertextuality, a literary work simply would be unintelligible, like language that had not yet been learned. Readers grasp meaning of literary works through their structure, their discourse and through their relation to archetypes or models encoding all of literature. A literary work's relation to these archetypal models may be in its imitation, its transformation or even its subversion of them. That is, every text refers implicitly to other texts, whether through its form, its content, its characterization or its specific use of language.

The notion of intertextuality was explained by Julia Kristeva, whose definition of the word represents an expansion of the concept introduced to her in her study of Bakhtin's theories.<sup>2</sup> For Kristeva the term "text" is synonymous with "system of signs"; thus for her, and others such as Barthes and Lévi-Strauss, the literary text becomes the site of a blending of the instinctive and the social where messages are collected and, often unconsciously, rearranged in new combinations. These messages are detectable in written texts as a result of this process of transposition and transformation, even though they are not stated explicitly.<sup>3</sup>

Christiane Rochefort's thirteen novels affirm Bakhtin's conception of the genre. She envisions it as a dynamic genre that can adapt to the individual styles and intentions of creative writers. For her, the fiction speaks primarily through heteroglossic or polyphonic interplay evidenced in the language of its narrator(s) and characters. Sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly, voices representing conflicting concepts, perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and intentions set up dialogic tension. Beginning with *Le Repos du guerrier* in 1958, the novel has served as a medium through which Christiane Rochefort could translate personal vision into fiction. Refined, transformed, and reconstituted, Rochefort's vision and her artistry reside in the fictional representation of the experience, behavior, attitude, and perception of her narrators and characters, especially as that is evidenced in the dialogic interaction of their textual voices. For Rochefort, as well as for the narrator of her *Conversations sans paroles* (cleverly subtitled as *roman*), the essence of meaning and of writing itself resides precisely in the interfacing of ideas, of positions, of words. She writes:

Je suis très regardante sur la conversation: c'est une des nourritures  
que je chéris le plus.  
Nourriture de l'âme.  
Et l'écriture même, n'est-ce pas une conversation? (25)

As to the words that make up the language of these written conversations, Rochefort has had much to say. It is evident from her texts that she was acutely aware of the inadequacy of language as an instrument of expression and communication. Its arbitrary nature, combined with the inevitable embedding of inherited ideologies, has been a constant source of frustration for her, particularly as a writer. She mockingly complains, "c'est un produit manufacturé, usiné, prêt à

cracher, qui s'écoule au dehors tel quel dès qu'il y a un trou. La bouche par exemple" (*C'est bizarre l'écriture*, 132). Caught in the paradox of those minor voices forced to operate within the discourse of the dominant, Rochefort insists that,

nous usons machinalement un langage reçu tout armé – contre nous, contre l'homme, et tant que nous l'usons sans examen ni révision déchirante (pour lui) nous exprimons le mode régnant, même si nous exprimons haut et clair une opposition à cet ordre.(134)

The problem of language is, in fact, a theme central to the entire corpus of Rochefort's writing, fictional and non-fictional. It underlies all other themes and, as this study points out, is persistently referenced within the cacophony of voices making up each of her different texts. Rochefort's texts serve as reminders that, as Freudian thought has taught us, what is voiced must be regarded with suspicion because conscious speech is not one hundred percent "conscious." The reader, along with the textual narratee, would do well to remember that there is always subversion going on in language and to be attentive to this phenomenon. Fundamentally ambivalent in nature, words provide Rochefort with a multivalent medium through which polyphonic voices can seek expression.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the years when Rochefort was creating her fiction, her work met with mixed reviews. Certainly it did not go unnoticed nor was it met with indifference. Scandal and criticism initially surrounded the publication of several of her books, notably: *Le Repos du guerrier* and *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*.<sup>4</sup> Much of the criticism centered around Rochefort's bold and unorthodox use of language, as well as the sexual content of her books.

Attracting attention to Rochefort's work are the dissident voices of her fictional characters who rail, sometimes only semi-consciously, against each other as well as against less easily identifiable, often hidden, but equally persistent voices coming from the various strata of Western society. At issue, inevitably, are the conflicting ideologies surrounding these characters and within which each struggles to find his own particular sense of truth and impose his own voice among the din. Yet, to date, little critical research has been done which would isolate, identify or attempt to analyze the many conflicting voices whose presence directly impacts textual meanings. One notable exception is the work done in 1990 by Barbro Nilsson which attempts to identify the voice of Rochefort herself within the pages of her novel *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*. Through comparative analysis of the essay *C'est bizarre l'écriture* and the novels *Le Repos du guerrier* and *Les Stances à Sophie*, Nilsson isolates recurring textual elements that she sees as invested with particular meaning by the author. She seeks to establish that *Quand tu vas chez les femmes* is an autobiographical text ("Le Chien n'aboie pas: *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*, Un roman autobiographique de Christiane Rochefort analysé à partir de ses oeuvres précédentes").

Although Rochefort is not yet deemed a major writer, one as important as Sarraute or Duras for example, her work deserves more recognition and study. Indeed, one purpose of the current analysis is to augment her standing within the canon of French women writers in particular as well as within the general corpus of French literature. Her books have garnered several awards of distinction: the *Nouvelle Vague* prize for *Le Repos du guerrier* in 1958, the *Roman Populiste* prize

for *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* in 1961, and the *Médicis* prize for *La Porte du fond* in 1988). Rochefort's books, or excerpts from her writing, frequently are included in both high school and university-level curricula, and her profile figures consistently in more recent anthologies of twentieth-century French literature.

Exerpts from *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* commonly are included in intermediate-level university texts because they provide an excellent point of departure for discussion concerning cultural aspects of modern-day France. Both *Le Repos du guerrier* and *Les Stances à Sophie* frequently are included in university courses in sociology and/or women's studies because of the important and controversial roles played by the female characters, as well as the socio-economic situations surrounding those roles. Her books, *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant* and *Heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, deal with feminist versions of utopia and make excellent additions to any study dealing with that theme. In this regard, Rochefort's work may be compared to others, notably Monique Wittig's *Les Guerrillères* and *Le Corps lesbien*. The autobiographical aspect of her books, in addition to her willingness to speak publicly about her fiction and her essays on writing, has attracted the attention of literary scholars who see her as a serious writer whose impact is significant.

Because of Rochefort's particular brand of humor, much of it achieved through innovative use of language, her work has interested linguists and philologists. One of the most thorough and insightful analyses of Rochefort's creativity with language is Monique Crochet's "La Création lexicale dans *Une Rose pour Morrison* de Christiane Rochefort." In her essay, Crochet categorizes and lists

numerous examples of morphological and syntactical innovations with which Rochefort personalized her writing. Crochet rightly asserts that, "d'un point de vue linguistique, la néologie révèle, par l'extrême diversité des procédés d'invention et des sources langagières, le haut degré de maîtrise de Rochefort, son érudition, son imagination, son sens du comique, en un mot, son talent d'écrivain." (394). Also of note with regard to criticism of Rochefort's fiction is the fine, detailed work done by Isabelle Constant, *Les Mots étincelants de Christiane Rochefort, langages d'utopie*, on the theme of utopia with emphasis on subversion through Rochefort's unique handling of language.

The most comprehensive study of Rochefort's novelist fiction to date is the recent publication in January of 1999 of Margaret-Anne Hutton's book, *Novels of Christiane Rochefort: Countering the Culture*. Hutton provides an introduction to Rochefort as woman and as writer, followed by a chronological overview of nine of Rochefort's novels. Her discussion focuses on the representation of minority groups, the presence of intertextual material, the use and thematization of language as a political tool, and some narrative and structural complexities. In her book, Hutton reiterates the contention of this study that "although Rochefort's status is acknowledged via her presence in anthologies, the press, and academic journals, and although she received literary prizes, what is lacking is the all-important back-up of critical material. . . ." (8) Hutton concludes with the suggestion that Rochefort's writing seems to lend itself to further analysis: articulation of discourse or discourses and the power relations from which they stem, as well as alignment with queer theory and politics (because it is marked by suspicion of any and all identity labels).

She points out that what is most notably lacking within existing critical analyses referencing Rochefort's work is any systematic analysis of her narrative technique. It can be added that, in particular interest to the current study, little attention has been given to voice as a narrative device either within the general corpus of Rochefort's fiction or with regard to any of her specific works.

Rochefort herself tried to make clear to her interested public that the question of voice was at the core of her writing project. In essence, she envisioned her writing as a kind of dialogue or conversation. The narrator in her 1997 *Conversations sans paroles* rhetorically queries, "et l'écriture même, n'est-ce pas une conversation?"(25) During an interview with Marianne Hirsch, she remarked about *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* that, "originally, I had a basic structure in mind, which was a dialogue between two little girls. It was a kind of game in my head. I often envision just such a skeleton—not an overall plan, but a dialogue, for instance."(*L'Esprit Créateur* 115) About *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, she noted that "en faisant ce livre ce que je visais c'est, comment dire, écrire en polyphonie: trois voix."(*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur* 283) The creation of these multiple voices at play within the narrative is not merely an exercise in style. Rochefort uses them to create meaning.

Meaning, however, derives from more than a parade of words. As Rochefort insisted, "le sens n'est pas dans le mot il est dans l'organisation." (*C'est bizarre l'écriture* 69) For Rochefort the organization is dialogic. Where voices collide, there is tension and struggle for dominance. Undercurrents, peripheral influences and ideologies begin to make themselves apparent within the discourse. The voices then become a medium through which textual meanings can be derived.

In reference to *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, Rochefort explained that, "although the book had started as a structural game two years before, it became a story fed by the potential of the children. It was no longer a game, but a message and the message dominated the form. . . . The dialogue was replaced by another structure, a network."(116) As for meaning within the lexicon, Rochefort warned,

les mots sont à surveiller de près. . . . Ils vivent leur vie. Ce n'est pas aussi pute qu'on pense. Ça ne raconte pas pour l'éternité ce que le Maître est parvenu à leur faire cracher sous la torture. C'est branché plus loin, vieux bateau qui à force de naviguer se convient de coquillages et toutes sortes de concrétions des profondeurs. A plus ou moins long terme ils refont surface et nous éclatent dans la figure.(*Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, 115)

That is to say, the reader must look beyond the words. He must attempt to determine who is speaking, to whom, from what perspective, about what, and with what intention. He must consider the words as they interact within their dialogic context.

Whether the voices are intradiegetic, issuing from characters within the narrative, or whether they are extradiegetic, issuing from an external narrator, they are always familiar voices that seem spontaneous and immediate. Theirs is a *spoken* language. Rochefort insisted, "moi qui écris tout naturellement le langage parlé."(10)

For her, "l'écrit-parlé est tout ce qu'il y a de sophistiqué, en fait d'écriture."(12)

Critics have likened Rochefort's writing to that of others known for their ability to creatively manipulate words and spelling to mimic spoken language, (notably, like Céline in *Une Rose pour Morrison* and like Queneau in *Le Repos du guerrier*).

Those writers usually mentioned are, in fact, ones that Rochefort expressed admiration for and whose influence she acknowledged. She admitted in her autobiographical novel: "je me souviens quand j'essayais d'écrire comme Faulkner,



Kafka, et Joyce."(*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 117) As Georgiana Colville noted after an interview with Rochefort,

during the 1950s in France she felt quite alienated in her way of writing but later she began to feel part of a new tradition, as more recent writers like Ajar, Agnès Pavy, Raymond Lévy and Rachel Mizrahi began to emerge in France. The bond between them is an attempt at transmitting spoken language or coming as close as possible to it in writing. This led me to mention Céline who had done this, also alone, much earlier; she replied that much as she dislikes him as a person, she has to admit to his stylistic breakthrough and feels closer to him than to more traditional novelists like François Mauriac. ("Christiane Rochefort", *Women Writers talking*, 215)

In the aforementioned interview with Marianne Hirsch, Rochefort listed among her favorite French writers Marguerite Duras, Virginia Woolf, Nathalie Sarraute, Boris Vian, Raymond Queneau, Denis Diderot and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos.

Rochefort's recent death in the summer of 1998 not only makes the body of her literary work definitive, but is likely to regenerate interest in her writing and its significance to the canon of women's writing and to the canon of French literature in general. This project, then, continues the debate that surrounds Rochefort's writing, with the aspiration of confirming her place within those frameworks.

Specifically, Chapter Two provides a summary of Rochefort's writing career. It establishes her place within the context of French women writers and within the context of French literature of the twentieth century. Attention is given to aspects of her personal history that are relevant to her writing project, as well as to some important literary influences. It recognizes Rochefort's stylistic development over the course of her writing career by organizing her eleven novels into three basic groups which form the basis for the analytic discussion in the following chapters.

Chapter Three analyses the narrative treatment of voice in the first group of novels, *Le Repos du guerrier*, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, and *Les Stances à Sophie*. The analysis demonstrates that, although Rochefort considered these early novels as inferior and as belonging to a period of her innocence as a writer, they are, in fact, quite complex and sophisticated from a narrative point of view. Further, and important to appreciation of Rochefort's development as a novelist, analysis points out that the seeds of Rochefort's later narrative style already are present. The discussion deconstructs verbal masks and subtle manifestations of multiple consciousnesses and intentionality at odds within the various discourses of her fiction. This section examines the different voices to determine their differing points of view or their layered plurality as dialogues in miniature of conventions, taboos, prescriptions, repressions, and authorities coming from some exterior source. The voices further are investigated for their importance to debates over selfhood and identity in Rochefort's autobiographical fiction. By focusing on the nature and dialogic interaction among the various novelistic voices, analysis discovers how the writer succeeded in creating narrative tension and meaning in her texts.

Chapter Four deals with novels belonging to what may be considered Rochefort's second or middle period, from 1966 to 1978: *Une Rose pour Morrison*, *Printemps au parking*, *Archaios ou le jardin étincelant*, and *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*. The analysis demonstrates that the novels written during this period are clearly marked by events, attitudes and discourses of those pivotal years in French society. Discussion reveals a shift in focus from the plight of individuals to that of groups and their combined reactions against situations and preconceptions they

perceive as unacceptable. Further, an increased element of fantasy and a heightened sense of ambiguity surrounding the speaking voices within the diegesis is noted and analysed. Metatextual concerns in the novels of this period are highlighted as the narrative voice more frequently becomes self-reflective and as the act of narrating is brought to the attention of the reader.

In Chapter Five, the analysis centers on the novels that comprise Rochefort's third and final period, between 1982 and her death in 1998: *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*, *La Porte du fond*, *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, *Conversations sans paroles*, and *Adieu Andromède*. The analysis points out that, as the narrating voice increasingly assumes multiple personae, its function within the diegesis varies as well. Increased urgency in the need to communicate is counter-balanced by heightened mystery in the traditional mechanisms of communication. Ambiguous and even anonymous speakers, hidden messages, and silences characterize these later texts, that, nevertheless, continue to "voice" Rochefort's unflagging resistance to stasis and to passive, unquestioning acceptance.

In the concluding section, I argue that the importance of Rochefort's writing project lies not only in its contribution to our understanding of the cultural influences and the effects of political and economic factors within post-war France on French citizens, but in its imaginative and creative narrative technique. I maintain that through complex, dialogic interaction of a diversity of social speech types and heterogeneity of perspectives, Rochefort's fictional narratives bring important contributions to the novelistic genre and to debates surrounding issues of language, meaning, power, and identity.

## NOTES

1. Access to Bakhtin's work has been difficult, however, for a number of reasons. First, because of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, the political repression under the Stalinist regime in Russia, and hardships further compounded by the Second World War, many of Bakhtin's manuscripts remained unpublished for a long time. From 1930-1936, he lived in forced exile in Kazakhstan. Several more decades of forced isolation from the cultural life of Moscow and Leningrad followed from 1936-1972, during which time he suffered from a debilitating bone disease that eventually required the amputation of a leg. It was not until 1965, twenty-five years after its submission as a doctoral dissertation in 1940, that his work on Rabelais and the carnivalesque was published. His work on Dostoevsky as a writer of the "polyphonic" novel was finally revised and republished in 1963. Some of his manuscripts were destroyed during the war, and others have only been published posthumously. A portion of his thought has been retrieved from documents attributed to other students who were part of a group of intellectuals with whom Bakhtin associated for the discussion and exchange of ideas. The authorship of several of the works produced by members of this circle remains in dispute. Further complicating access to Bakhtinian thought is Bakhtin's own admission of incompleteness, a penchant for variation, and a plurality of terms to name the same phenomenon. And finally, as Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, it is in translation that Western readers first become acquainted with his writings. He adds that, Bakhtin has been translated by individuals who did not know or did not understand this system of thought, though I will concede that this is not an easy matter. As a result, key concepts, such as *discourse*, *utterance*, *heterology*, *extopy*, and many others, are rendered by misleading "equivalents" or even simply dropped altogether by a translator more concerned with the avoidance of repetition or obscurity. In addition, the same Russian word is not translated in the same way by the various translators, a fact that may cause the Western reader undue difficulty. (*Mikhail Bakhtin*, xii)

2. In her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," included as a chapter of *Desire in Language: a Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* a collection of Kristeva's articles gathered together by Roudiez, Kristeva discusses Bakhtin's theories, adding her own interpretation of them and expanding on them. In the essay, she contends that every text is constructed as a mosaic of citations and that every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts. Jean-Yves Tadié, in *Le Roman au vingtième siècle*, discusses the association between Kristeva's concept of intertextuality and Bakhtin's earlier theories. (193)

3. In her book *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Kristeva writes, Le terme inter-textualité désigne cette transposition d'un (ou de plusieurs) système(s) de signes en une autre; mais puisque ce terme a été souvent entendu dans le sens banal de "critiques de sources" d'un texte, nous lui préférons celui de *transposition* qui a l'avantage de préciser que le passage

d'un système signifiant à un autre exige une nouvelle articulation du théorique.  
(59,60)

4. The following represents a sampling of critical reception of Rochefort's work in the French press:

Emile Henriot in *Le Monde*, (November 26, 1958), criticized *Le Repos du guerrier* for its "crudité de langage," adding that "à côté de Mme Rochefort, Mme Françoise Sagan est un pensionnaire, et *l'Histoire d'O* une bluette.

J. Gregoire, in *Europe Auto* (January, 1960), wrote that "la tendance à tout remanier au sexe et à ses manifestations est souvent le fait d'une impuissance ou d'une frigidité."

Clément Ledoux, in *Le Canard Enchaîné* (September, 1958): "Cette intelligence-là n'est qu'une forme prétentieuse d'une certaine sottise."

The editors of *Lumière* (December, 1958): "*Le Repos du guerrier* est un livre immonde, piétinant toute dignité humaine et faisant aucunement honneur à ceux qui le primèrent, ni . . . aux Éditions Grasset qui acceptèrent de le publier."

## CHAPTER 2 OVERVIEW OF ROCHEFORT'S WRITING CAREER

"L'écriture, c'est insondable: plus on creuse, plus on découvre. La chose qu'on ne sait pas qu'on cherchait est cachée à l'intérieur, tout au fond"  
(*Conversations sans paroles*, 71).

One of the collective goals of women writing in the twentieth century was to examine the world from the female perspective, redefining themselves and their roles in the process. In the novelistic genre, women found an ideal literary form through which to accomplish that goal. Foregrounded in their work are not only issues pertaining to relationships between subjectivities and the constitution of those subjectivities, but relationships between gender and writing, psychoanalysis and feminism, and sexual difference and essentialism. Working within the pliant form of the novel, Christiane Rochefort and other modern and contemporary female writers were able to expand the literary scene by bringing elements of their inner world into consciousness and giving them expression and shape.

All of these issues are integral to Rochefort's novelistic fiction. Rochefort was a writer, not with a cause, but with causes. Indeed, her fiction seems designed to raise consciousness, encourage questioning, and promote debate over acceptance of the *status quo*, whether that involves gender, age, sexuality, or existing social and political institutions. Although influenced by the experimentation with form begun by French writers during the 1950s<sup>1</sup>, Rochefort turned her attention to different

concerns even while adapting narrative and structural innovations to her own purposes.

While the antinarrative<sup>2</sup> or disruptive narrative techniques demonstrated in Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* or Beckett's *Molloy* inform Rochefort's texts in part (particularly her later texts: *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*, *La Porte du fond*, and *Conversations sans paroles*), she adamantly refused to adhere to any particular mode, preferring instead to forge her own particular eclectic style. She once commented that,

en France on est terrorisé par une certaine idée de l'écriture. Combien de gens sont embrouillés là-dedans, j'en suis sûre, c'est le structuralisme, combien de gens sont embrouillés là-dedans, ils croient que c'est ça qu'il faut faire, donc on ne se trouve pas soi-même sous ce terrorisme. Bon, il a fallu enlever tout le terrorisme culturel. (Crochet, 431)

Indeed, analysis of Rochefort's narrative reveals its refusal to fit neatly into any category.

Rochefort's refusal of any kind of categorization extended to the entire culture of literary theory which tended to dominate the literary scene in France in the latter half of the century. She disdainfully considered all this theorization of literature as reductive and pointless and its participants as arrogant, pseudo-intellectuals. She once vehemently declared,

we're seeing far too much literary theory being written today, considering literary theory isn't at all important . . . it's just nonsense. . . . General theories – what should be done and what shouldn't be done – all the *Tel Quel* theory, for example – in my opinion it should be put in the trash can. No question about it. It's wrong. (*Shifting Scenes*, 184)

For Rochefort, these theorists merely try to "validate their own way of thinking . . . when they use the book just as a crutch to prop up their own ideas." (*Shifting Scenes*, 185)

Generally speaking, Rochefort's fiction is anti-establishment. In it, narrators and characters verbally contest modernization and the capitalist system with its regulatory institutions, mindless authority figures and, perhaps especially, controlling discourses emanating from established sources of power. Her characters and narrators frequently represent the popular class and various groups that Rochefort perceived as oppressed or marginalized in some way. Among these groups we can mention, for example: women, children, homosexuals, laborers, students, even writers. Rochefort's themes include such controversial or taboo areas as: government policies affecting individual lives, female and gay rights, state-controlled education, Christianity, child sexuality, incest, and even sado-masochistic sex. Yet, at the heart of Rochefort's fiction, in nearly every instance, is the solitary individual at odds with mechanisms of society that would limit his perceptions, his activities, and therefore, his identity.<sup>3</sup>

One trend in the novel during the twentieth century was toward creation of a kind of hybrid form that Serge Douvrosky referred to as *autofiction*<sup>4</sup>, a blend of autobiographical and fictional writing which the author candidly acknowledges as such. Considerations of time, memory, perspective and voice are of particular importance in appreciation of the writer's form and content in this new hybrid form. Male and female writers such as Roland Barthes (*La Chambre claire*, 1980), Michel Tournier (*Le Vent Paraclét*, 1977), Maryse Condé (*Heremakemon*, 1976), Natalie



Sarraute (*Enfance*, 1983), Marguerite Duras (*L'Amant*, 1984), Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Le Miroir qui revient*, 1984) and Christiane Rochefort, (*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 1978 and *Conversations sans paroles*, 1997), for example, were instrumental in their emergence and development. These modern writers of autobiographical texts, or autofiction, realized that it is not possible to give a truly accurate account of their own lives because memory is unreliable, selective and transforming. They were also acutely aware of reader expectation and response to content of any writing labeled "novel" or "autobiography," particularly with regard to perception of truth. The entire concept of "truth" is called into question.

Rochefort's participation in and contribution to the newly developing body of women's writing is also worthy of note. Generally speaking, the chorus of women's voices so evident in today's literature is a recent development, particularly in France. Although throughout the centuries a handful of women have managed to impact literature through their active role as writers and patrons of writers, it was not until the twentieth century that the world significantly opened up for them. Only then were many of the social and political gains sought by previous writers such as Marie de France, Madame de Lafayette, George Sand, and Colette, finally realized. Women in France now write and publish freely. They launch journals, own publishing houses, and are in the forefront of experimentation and innovation with new literary forms. On this subject Rochefort commented that,

things are beginning to even out . . . these days there are more women in institutions like the university system, more women in publishing, etc. even if they don't usually have the same power as men. . . . I think this equalizing business is a good thing. . . . In France, women are being published more frequently. . . . It's still a little lopsided, but the problem of women's posterity is going to be taken care of; they're

going to be known as a matter of course from now on. Complete disappearance is a thing of the past. (*Shifting Scenes*, 180-1)

Because literature is one of the most important cultural forms through which societies shape their sense of values and reality, it follows that any attempt to define a national culture would only be partial and incomplete if it depended on the writing of only one segment of that culture. As Simone de Beauvoir eloquently stated,

what we all want to express by means of very different works, is certainly not the feminine universe to which tradition formerly tried to confine us: it is all of contemporary society as we see it from our viewpoint as women. (as cited in Ophir, *Regards féminins*, 11-12)

Scholars have agreed that Colette and Simone de Beauvoir were among the earliest in this century to impact literature with a new vision of woman. Germaine Brée commented that, “in the twenties, after the upheaval of war, a new type of woman writer appeared, often university trained, conscious of her intellectual powers, less willing to accept either her relegation to the ranks of feminist writer or the current definition of her feminine nature.” (*Women Writers in France*, 46) Colette, for example, redefined the relationship between men and women through the depiction of women as subjects and men as objects. Beauvoir laid the foundation for modern feminist thought with the publication of her 1948 *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and then worked to create novels illustrating theses introduced in her theoretical works. Consistent with Germaine Brée’s “new type of woman”, Christiane Rochefort was well read, educated, intellectual, and certainly resistant to any labels or preconceptions traditionally associated either with women in general or with the nature of women’s writing. As in the work of both Colette and Beauvoir, Rochefort’s fiction presents a collection of narrators and protagonists who are largely female,

therefore offering the reader a view of the world and its participants from a woman's perspective.

For Rochefort, though, female subjectivity was not enough; she insisted on a changed notion of femininity as well. In an interview with Monique Crochet, Rochefort underscored the difference she felt between her own writing and that of these earlier novelists. She explained that,

c'est pour ça que je n'ai pas aimé Colette quand je l'ai lue dans mon adolescence . . . ce qui ne m'a pas plu, c'est que très souvent elle entrait dans l'image suggérée des femmes. Au fait, j'aime la littérature de révolte, de résistance. . . ." ("Entretien avec Christiane Rochefort" 428)

It is precisely that inherited "image suggérée des femmes" which piques Rochefort's ire and that Beauvoir had so thoroughly and convincingly deconstructed in her treatise *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

Germaine Brée noted that the end of the war in Indochina, despite the trauma of decolonization, brought about a period of prosperity that contributed to disengaging literature from earlier socio-political preoccupations. Two fundamental concerns marked the work of French writers of both sexes: "the relationship between established literary patterns and socially accepted, inherited ways of seeing or constructing reality; [and] the phenomenon of writing itself, of how language works, of why and how a writer works. . . ." (Brée 58) These two concerns are pertinent to Rochefort's personal philosophy and to her fictional narrative. For Rochefort, the novel served as a medium for challenging inherited constructions of social reality and self that she found particularly unacceptable, limiting and oppressive. She was keenly aware of the power of language to perpetuate preconceived notions. She not

only railed constantly against that phenomenon, but personally took up the weapon of language and manipulated it in a determined effort to try and disarm it.

In this regard, that is in her preoccupation with the power of language to determine human perception, Rochefort noted,

on n'a pas le temps de se demander D'où vient le mot, qu'il est déjà là et occupe le papier, et y a planté son petit drapeau. Nous n'avons pas à chercher les mots mais à les perdre; à construire les phrases qu'à les démanteler; car ce sont des forteresses qui nous enferment dans le mode de pensée regnant – sans que nous en ayons la moindre conscience; et nous en font transporteurs. Ce n'est pas notre faute, purée. C'est le dressage, nommé par antiphrase éducation. . . . Écrire vraiment consiste à désécrire. (*C'est bizarre l'écriture*, 133-4)

For Rochefort and others, the challenge was, in a sense, to reinvent language. Their writing evidences an attempt not only to speak against what they regarded as phallogocentric discourse and a refusal to accept the world as it is, but a creative exercise in word play including the invention of neologisms.

Little is known of Rochefort's private life. She was born in Paris, in the fourteenth *arrondissement*, the only child of working-class parents. Of them she related, "mon père était un petit télégraphiste de dix-huit ans quand il épousa ma mère qui avait le même âge. Je suis presque une enfant naturelle, j'imagine que je suis née assez vite après le mariage. . . . Je me sens d'une génération spontanée. . . ." (Bourdette, 36) The fourteenth *arrondissement* is a neighborhood that has been viewed as ambivalent owing to its motley population of mostly working class citizens and artisans sprinkled with a relatively small percentage of aristocrats, plutocrats and members of the bourgeoisie. One critic, Claire Lise Tondeur, referred to it as "un peu bohème et révolutionnaire." (*Voix de femmes*, 81) Politically, the quarter supported the Commune in 1871, Boulanger in the 1880's, Vichy in World

War II, and de Gaulle in the years after the war. If milieu contributes to the formation of one's personality and ideology, it is not surprising then to recognize this bohemian and revolutionary attitude in the writer as well as in her fiction.

Rochefort's early education began at the *École Communale*. Soon afterward, her parents divorced and placed her in a convent school, the *Cours Lacordaire*, where she finished her elementary education. Of those years, Rochefort commented, "j'ai été une élève douée, mais indisciplinée. J'étais clown, vous comprenez, et j'avais toujours zéro de conduite." (*Visages d'aujourd'hui*, 36) As this study shows, Rochefort's religious training significantly impacted her writing. Numerous references, allusions, and even direct biblical quotes permeate the pages of her novels. Christian archetypes frame some of her characterizations, and Christian patriarchal orthodoxy comes under relentless verbal scorn.

Declared a good student by the nuns of the convent school, however, Rochefort was enrolled next in the Lycée Fénélon where she excelled in mathematics and natural history but, ironically, did poorly in literature. After secondary school, she tried her hand at drawing, painting, sculpture and music, all the while earning her own living as a bank employee, as a clerk in various government offices, and as a journalist for a local paper.

Earning a living was a primary and a constant concern for Rochefort during the early days of her writing career. For the most part, she was self-taught through her voracious reading and general curiosity about science and the arts. Eventually, she enrolled briefly at the Sorbonne where she took courses in medicine, psychiatry, psychology and ethnology. She was disappointed in the university though, and

considered her decision to enroll an error. Talking with interviewer Denise Bourdet, Rochefort remarked, "j'ai été à la Sorbonne. Je m'y suis promenée avec agrément, mais j'étais incapable de m'insérer dans l'organisation administrative, de prendre mes inscriptions en temps voulu, bref, je ne suis pas une *carriériste* (sic) et j'ai renoncé l'agrégation." (*Visages d'aujourd'hui*, 36) Rochefort saw institutions in general as mechanisms of power, imposing their will, organization, and ideology on individuals. Her reaction to them was invariably adverse. Educational institutions were a particular target of her criticism, as evidenced by her 1975 novel *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, and her book-length essay *Les Enfants d'abord*.

Writing seems to have been an early calling for Rochefort. From her childhood on she wrote poems, plays, journals, songs, and essays for her personal amusement and satisfaction. Of those beginning efforts Rochefort has related, "c'était mon époque gongoriste. . . Plus tard j'ai fait de l'écriture automatique. J'en ai des kilos. Une femme, n'est-ce pas, fréquente toujours ses aînés. Les miens étaient des épigones du surréalisme. Mais j'ai vite été atterrée par l'absence de contenu de mon écriture automatique, et j'ai cessé cet exercice." (Bourdet, 37) Publicly, she worked for a while as a newspaper correspondent. Later, she spent fifteen years as press attachée to the Cannes film festival, during which time she wrote a number of articles on film criticism. She also worked for a short time for Henri Langlois of the Paris Cinémathèque. Rochefort eventually lost her job because she was seen as willful, out-spoken, and troublesome. Although her career as a novelist did not begin until she was forty years old, with the publication of her first novel *Le Repos du guerrier*, writing remained her passion. For her, the exigencies of conjugal life

proved too heavy an imposition on her time and writing efforts. She noted, "j'ai été mariée, j'avais des préoccupations ménagères, et je faisais de la littérature alimentaire." (40) Reflecting on her marriage of only four years, Rochefort once remarked, "that gentleman couldn't understand that I wanted to write at night, he kept asking me to come to bed, so I had to choose: obviously, I wasn't going to give up my writing. I have never regretted it." (*Women Writers Talking*, 210)

Although she vehemently disliked labels of any kind (she emphatically declared during one interview, "I would be an anarchist if that were not already a label!" (*Women Writers Talking*, 209)), Rochefort can be regarded as one of the pioneers of the women's movement in France. Her 1958 novel, *Le Repos du guerrier*, already foregrounds themes that will become central to the twentieth-century feminist agenda. She was a participant in the early years of women's encounter groups that grew out of the events of May '68 and in the demonstrations for free legal abortion during the early 1970's. During the early years of the *Mouvement de libération de la femme*, or MLF, she wrote three strong articles published in the feminist paper *Le Torchon brûle* warning against the dangers besetting the organization. Early on, she had recognized various destructive forces threatening to weaken and divide its energies: the attempt by left-wing political groups to annex the movement to their own ends; the use of the acronym MLF by the mass media to promote their productions and performances; and the selfish wish of some of its own members to usurp as much personal power as they could. An iconoclast, Rochefort eventually lost interest in the women's movement, in the end just another organization. All of her work, in fact, exhibits a common trait,

abhorrence of respected hierarchies and power structures. Her writing stands as a passionate appeal for the right to be different and for respect for the oppressed, whether women, workers, sexual misfits, or children. For her, the modern society of consummation corrupts, oppresses and destroys what is natural and desirable in people and in the environment.

As to the question of feminine literature or the more recent concept of *écriture féminine*, Rochefort, not surprisingly, expressed strong sentiments. Asked if she thought there were such a thing as a feminine style of writing, she declared emphatically, "c'est toujours cette même sacrée histoire. Moi, j'aime pas ça le style féminin ce qu'on appelait comme ça." ("Entretien avec Christiane Rochefort", *French Review*, 428) She also expressed hostility toward Hélène Cixous' theory of feminine writing or *écriture féminine*, which purports that women's writing emerges from and celebrates female sexuality. As outlined by Diana Holmes, on a formal level *écriture féminine* seems to signify "disruption of orthodox structures, cyclical patterning, a voice that is sensual, musical and passionate but self-effacing before the rich associative power of words." (*French Women's Writing*, 226) Some of the privileged themes of such writing would include: writing itself, women's experience of their own bodies, and women's relationships with each other. Although an argument could be made that Rochefort's writing demonstrates traits associated with this concept of *écriture féminine*, (in fact, Diana Holmes has done that in her essay "Feminism and Realism: Christiane Rochefort and Annie Ernaux"), Rochefort, basically, saw no difference between men and women writers as to their style and form. It was only in the area of content that she would acknowledge any possible



differences between male and female writing, those due to social or cultural considerations. For her, as far as artistic expression is concerned, differences among individuals must necessarily be expected, but not between entire groups. She insisted that,

a lot of stupid things have been written about "writing as a woman," especially in reference to biology. You can't determine what biological differences are; they're so overlaid with culture that it's absolutely impossible to get a clear picture of them. And it's stupid to try. . . . Besides, I'm not sure I believe in biological differences. People do have different experiences, of course, but writing as a woman is like writing as a black, or writing as a coal miner, a samurai, an Indian Buddhist. . . . I have a certain material to work with. But that doesn't mean that there's a specificity to the *writing*. I could just as easily have given you the response you got from Sarraute: "I'm not a woman writer; I'm a writer." (*Shifting Scenes*, 175)

Rochefort's formal writing career began with the publication of two short stories: *Le Démon des pinceaux* (1953) and *Le Fauve et le rouge-gorge* (1955). However, it was not until Grasset published her first novel, *Le Repos du guerrier* in 1958, that she became well known and respected as a writer. The novel was an instant success selling 600,000 copies, taking its place on the best-seller list, and receiving the *Prix de la Nouvelle Vague*. (In 1962, Roger Vadim adapted the novel for the screen, and then-reigning sex symbol of French cinema, Brigitte Bardot, played the starring role.) The novel, scandalous and controversial from the beginning, attacks marriage and accepted role models in relationships between men and women. Rochefort questions the mutually alienating effects of preconceived stereotypes on both sexes. In particular, this couple participates in a sadomasochistic sexual relationship in which a bourgeois woman humiliatingly submits to the erotic demands of a bohemian male.

Rochefort's second novel, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* (1961) was also well received and earned her a second award, the *Prix du Roman Populiste*. This award was established in 1931 to be given "à toute oeuvre qui peint les gens du peuple et les milieux populaires, à condition que se dégage de cette peinture une tendresse humaine vraie." (cited in introduction by Thody, xxiv) Another success, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* was ranked third on the bestseller lists in May 1961 and adapted for French television in 1974. Like *Le Repos du guerrier*, this second novel also found its way to the big screen in a film by Godard entitled *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*. According to Rochefort, this film "n'a pas regardé mon livre mais les choses posant les mêmes questions à peu près." (*C'est bizarre l'écriture*, 55) *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* has become almost a classic. Excerpts of it are regularly included in high school and university French textbooks as a means of introducing students to vocabulary as well as to aspects of modern French culture, particularly life during the years now referred to as the *trente glorieuses* immediately following the Second World War. As Diana Holmes aptly commented,

*Les Petits Enfants du siècle* (1961) engages directly with contemporary social issues in a classically realist way. The narrative concerns what Rochefort sees as a cluster of interlocking social policies designed to ensure both social control and increased industrial productivity: the encouragement of a high birth-rate through financial incentives and lack of contraception; the relocation of the working class in estates . . . the channeling of the desire for pleasure into the consumption of manufactured goods, achieved through advertising and marketing techniques. . . . (*Contemporary French Fiction by Women*, 30)

As in *Le Repos du guerrier*, both sexes feel stifled by predetermined class and sex roles. This time, all the characters come from the lower strata of Parisian society, the working class. The narrative unfolds among the inhabitants of the

*habitations à loyer modéré* or HLMs of the then newly-constructed apartments built outside Paris to rehouse inner-city slum-dwellers.

*Les Stances à Sophie* followed in 1963. A kind of *Bildungsroman*, the novel traces, in first-person, a young woman's gradual awareness that marriage is a social institution deeply determined by tradition and in which pre-determined roles and relationships are extremely difficult to change. She learns that individualism is, in fact, a myth. Her choices as a consumer (and therefore the sense of self that she attempts to express through those choices) are illusory. Underlying all this limitation and pre-determination are ideologically charged words, in a language that is encoded with values and meanings. In this novel, the protagonist's husband Philippe symbolically represents a political and economic system that perpetuates myths that serve only to thwart individual expression and achievement, particularly for women.

*Une Rose pour Morrison* followed in 1966. A futuristic caricature of modern society, its characters and themes presciently announce the events of May 1968 and feminist theory of the 1970's. As in *Les Stances à Sophie*, Rochefort's narrative attacks those forces of society that tend to stifle the individual. Again, linguistic and sexual revolutions are preliminary to political change. One critic, Lucille Becker, described the novel as "an allegory of pre-1968 France in which the characters are personifications of abstract qualities." (*Twentieth-Century French Women Novelists*, 144) The novel's title derives from an actual person. Norman Morrison was an American who, in protest to the Vietnam War, committed suicide on the steps of the Pentagon in 1965. Finding himself living in what seems like a police state, the main character, Triton Sauvage, becomes a rock star and adopts the stage name Amoking

Bird. He travels around the world singing antiwar songs and telling people the true meaning of words they hear and use.

The student rebellion of 1968 forms the backdrop for Rochefort's next novel, *Printemps au parking*. Here the protagonist is a run-away adolescent who goes to the Latin Quarter where he strikes up a friendship with a university student. Their brief homosexual encounter transforms their lives. Having crossed this social barrier, they both begin to question other dictates of society. The novel's ending, at the approach of springtime, suggests another "beginning"—that of a freer, more tolerant and open society. This novel was apparently a difficult one for Rochefort to write; she began writing it in 1964, before *Une Rose pour Morrison*, and rewrote it three times before releasing it for publication. Still dissatisfied, she decided to write a sort of journal of the adventures and obstacles that accompanied the writing of the book. This journal was eventually published in 1970 as *C'est bizarre l'écriture*. It was also published in Canada in 1977 under the title *Journal du printemps, récit d'un livre*.

The question of sexuality is a recurring theme in Rochefort's work. Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, incestual, sadistic, and masochistic sexual relations all play an important role somewhere within the corpus of her writing. But, as Rochefort explained:

sex is *absent*. Sex, that is the desire, longing, feelings, and emotions that are really connected with sexual energy, with the body itself in its purely sexual manifestation. Sex is an organ of communication. But when you take a look at what actually happens, that's not at all what you see. The end result, what with the frantic socialization of that particular mechanism, what with oppression, alienation, exploitation, sublimation, recuperation, that's not at all what it's about. (*Homosexualities and French Literature*, 103)

For her, the horror of being stigmatized for sexual morals, or for anything for that matter, is a very real form of imprisonment.

In her personal life, Rochefort was bisexual. She has stated, "I've loved people, and sometime it's been women, sometimes men, that's all there is to it." (105) Asked if she thought there existed a connection between homosexuality and certain literary trends, Rochefort responded, "when you see how many homosexual men there are among artists and how good they are, it seems there must be a female element in their creation. . . . It would seem that one must be double-sexed to be a creator." (108) In each of her books, the question of sexuality is situated within broader issues of power, relationship, and subjectivity.

Rochefort's next two books can be classified as utopian novels: *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant* (1972) and *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* (1975). *Archaos* is Rochefort's longest novel and was her favorite. She considered it the most positive text she ever wrote. The novel begins as a medieval epic with all of the conventional characters of that period: a king, queen, ministers, and so on. In this make-believe kingdom, the guiding principle is that, "rien n'instruit comme le plaisir." (*Archaos*, 152) The new Utopia is founded on the abolition of personal property, authority, and law and on the belief that good sex is important for everyone. "Good sex" is seen as that which includes tenderness and generosity toward the sexual partner and a sense of communion with the world at large. Outside the kingdom, desire and pleasure are linked to the destructive designs of Order and Progress. There, in other words, sex is a mechanism for control. As Diana Holmes explained, "desire, then, is seen as a vital part of feeling whole, and as an impulse constrained and diminished by the language

and institutions of a patriarchal culture.”(*French Women’s Writing*, 263) Separation of the sexes is virtually abolished in favor of androgyny or what Rochefort sees as wholeness. Androgyny refuses polarization and represents a kind of vision that would focus instead on the positive attributes of both genders and blend them into a total sense of self. The novel suggests that this blending of personality traits is possible in all human beings. In essence, its message is how to desire without power.

*Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* is a utopian vision that focuses attention on the plight of children, whom Rochefort views as a particularly oppressed group of humanity. In this novel children unite in rebellion against an insensitive school teacher and run away to escape from a society that tries to stifle them at every turn. They establish a commune where logic and authoritarianism are to be replaced by intuition and imagination. In her non-fictional text *Les Enfants d'abord* (1976), Rochefort cites facts and figures to support her thesis that children are an oppressed minority all over the world, having virtually no rights of their own. Both books met with hostility. In the opinion of her readers, she had attacked and maligned the traditional family unit.

During the next several years, Rochefort turned her attention away from the novel to produce a book-length essay on the condition of children (*Les Enfants d'abord*, 1976), a whimsical autobiography (*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 1978), a collection of short stories (*Pardonnez-nous nos enfances*, 1978), and a free-style translation of John Lennon’s *In His Own Write* (*En flagrant délire*, 1981). Crossing boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, Rochefort’s autobiographical text was a kind of literary experiment with Maurice Chavardès at the request of the

publisher, Stock. It was based on a taped interview which was intended to provide a spontaneous, oral-style text of a dialogue between writers, similar to the one successfully conducted by Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier in *Les Parleuses* in 1974. Because Rochefort was not pleased with the taped dialogue, she subsequently reworked the material as "literature." In the introduction to her book she explained:

Maurice Chavardès et moi avons passé ensemble une quarantaine d'heures rien qu'à parler, et bourré plus de vingt bandes. J'ose dire qu'on ne se connaissait pas à la fin mieux qu'avant. Lui n'était pas sensé me faire ses confidences, il posait les questions. Et moi, qui lui livrais ma vie, je crois qu'il me connaissait mieux quand il n'avait que lu mes livres.

L'interview, c'est l'anti-communication. (31)

For Rochefort, the idea of experimenting with a form held all the appeal of this project. She admitted that a taste for experimentation, a curiosity for research, and a love for games of language were her personal demons. And experiment it is. Certainly it cannot be categorized according to the criteria set forth in Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*. Closer to Serge Dubrovsky's concept of *autofiction*, Rochefort's book establishes its own parameters. Georgiana Colvile referred to the book as a "potpourri of thoughts, poems, proverbs, word games, lists of memories, militant statements, newspaper clippings, favorite recipes, and many other items, all full of humor and rebellion [which] gives the reader a far more accurate portrait of her than any conventional (auto)biography ever could." (*Women Writers Talking*, 226)

Rochefort returned to the novelistic genre with the publication in 1982 of *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*. In it, the dark, anti-hero of the novel, Bertrand, allows

his desire to draw him into anguished, masochistic behavior which he survives, but only barely. A teacher and psychoanalyst, Bertrand has just spent a year researching and preparing a philosophical treatise. This project having caused him to suffer moral despair and confusion, he makes a trip to Paris where he visits prostitutes and pays them to beat and humiliate him, seeking relief through sexual and physical punishment. In a kind of reversal of roles, he allows himself to become enslaved to the destructive nature of strong and masterful women. Petra destroys his career by publicly refuting him as he attempts to present his research in the university's amphitheater. His sexual perversions, his martyrdom, his lack of any human relationship based on compassion or acceptance, combined with the fact that he exhibits no clear sense of self or purpose, all place him outside "ordered society." His wife, Malaure, eventually even appropriates the narrative and replaces him as the figure of the writer. Bertrand, in the end, is left without words, without a voice.

As part of its *Collection La part obscure*, (collection under the direction of Eglal Errera), Grasset & Fasquelle published Rochefort's *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, in 1984. Perhaps unsure of how to classify this particular text, and with no inscription included by the author either in its title or on the flyleaves to indicate an intended genre, the book has subsequently been referred to as an essay. A quoted statement printed on the back cover of the paperback edition states that,

"La part obscure" demande à des écrivains d'écrire un texte que l'on n'a pas coutume de lire sous leur plume. L'auteur le plus libre, le plus accompli, semblerait avoir un enfant secret. Certains ont préféré le garder dans le silence des mots, d'autres ont décidé de le mettre au jour, d'offrir à l'étonnement de leurs lecteurs un "ce que je suis aussi."



In this book, Rochefort assembled a collection of diverse observations, thoughts, quotations, comments, and news items of current events that, in their ensemble, offer a personal vision of the world around her and, through that vision, an understanding of herself. In this motley assortment of mini-texts, Rochefort draws attention to the ironies, paradoxes, inconsistencies, uncertainties, incongruities, and injustices of an imperfect world where stupidity, ignorance and pettiness abound. In a style that recalls John Dos Passos' 1913 *U.S.A.* trilogy, Rochefort combines various literary devices/forms such as memoir, journal, news item, advertisement, editorial, dialogue, and poetry to give a view of the contemporary world. She touches on many domains of everyday life affecting the human condition in general: art, politics, religion, philosophy, ecology, urbanism, education, family relationships. At the end, in a section entitled "*Visage originel*," she turns her regard inward. Using a tone that is at once personal and indulgent, she comments on her feelings of insignificance and vulnerability in a complicated, often hostile world:

Mais moi, moi, je t'aime . . . tu es une vraie chose petite être, pleine de traces et de cicatrices, à jamais imparfaite, mais moi je t'aime car je sais de quelle bataille tu es le héros vaincu et désolé. (220)

In 1988, Rochefort received another award of literary distinction, the *Prix Médicis* for her powerful novel on incest and child sexual abuse, *La Porte du fond*. The narrator recounts in conversational style, without self-pity, the story of the person she has become. Rochefort's novel dramatizes prevailing myths surrounding the issue of father-daughter incest: the myth of the seductive daughter and that of the collusive mother. As Margaret-Anne Hutton noted, "Rochefort prompts us, as readers, to engage with the central issue of responsibility and consent, confronting us

with our own prejudices and preconceptions.” (“Assuming Responsibility,” *Modern Language Review*, 333) Additionally, as always in Rochefort’s narratives, an attack is leveled against patriarchal institutions. This time focus is on Freudian psychology and Christianity, because of their pervasive ideology in contemporary society and particularly with regard to their impact on family dynamics and the relationships of power. As Hutton pointed out, the question becomes, “How free is the individual to operate outside the prevailing ethos of that society?” (339) The narrative then, in essence, raises the possibility of multiple victims. The issues raised in *La Porte du fond* are also addressed in Rochefort’s book-length essay *Les Enfants d’abord*, 1976. In her essay, she makes clear her belief that incest itself should not be condemned. The offense for Rochefort is, rather, the abuse of power in the context of parent-child relations.

After a hiatus of ten years, Rochefort published two additional texts in the year before her death: *Conversations sans paroles* and *Adieu Andromède*, (1997). *Adieu Andromède* is a collection of free verse and miscellaneous, short musings inspired as a mature artist reviews poignant moments of her life. Both texts are poetic, not only in form but in tone. Both posit personal, philosophic contemplation on past and present relationships, on the precariousness and purpose of individual existence, on death, and on the aleatory nature of communication, particularly the inadequacy of language to effectuate it either orally or in writing. Though a lament of the irritants, frustrations, and insidious controls civilization imposes on individual life, both texts are essentially optimistic that what is objectionable can be overcome. The human spirit, in determined defiance, can and will prevail.

In an interview with Denise Bourdet, Rochefort remarked that she had recently attended a colloquium in Royaumont on the subject of the novel. "J'ai peu parlé," she continued, "et seulement avec Glissant qui soutenait que la poésie ne devait pas se mélanger au roman. Moi, je trouve que si." (*Visages d'aujourd'hui*, 37)

Rochefort ends her narrative in *Conversations sans paroles* with the couplet:

Mon corps à la terre, et mon esprit  
Aux électrons qui l'ont créé. (110)

*Conversations sans paroles* is cleverly subtitled *roman*, one of only two of her texts to be so designated (the other being *La Porte du fond*). It is, however, unmistakably autobiographical. Recalling Nathalie Sarraute's *tropismes* or sub-conversations, Rochefort would have the reader attempt to reach beyond the surface of words:

ce sera, si j'y parviens, à travers ses divagations, et ses  
émerveillements, l'histoire, autrement remarquable, bien que  
beaucoup moins remarquée, de ce que portent les yeux, de ce qu'ils  
délivrent, et échangent, au-delà des paroles, et sans elles.  
Je ne sais pas si je vais m'en tirer. (33)

Though Rochefort's novels are highly personal, most often written in first person, their scope extends beyond the narrative exploration of individual experience or psyche. As her narrator insists:

Il ne s'agit pas de toi.  
Ni non plus de moi. Moi je ne suis ici  
qu'un support.  
Il s'agit, comme toujours, de la vie.

De la vie. (103)

Rochefort's novelistic exploration of life foregrounds the enduring theme of the solitary individual pitted against invisible yet powerful forces inherent in civilized society. Through the variety of voices in her novels, she effectively deals

with the personal and, at the same time, makes a powerful statement about such broad issues as language, sexuality, essentialism, and institutional and economic exploitation. Consequently, from the pages of her texts emerges a cacophony of diverse voices that, through their insistent interchange, challenge existing myth and convention as they create narrative interest and tension.

Three broad groupings delineate Christiane Rochefort's stylistic development over the forty years of her novelistic career. Her early novels, which gained her recognition and established her as a serious writer, appeared in the five years between 1958 and 1963 (*Le Repos du guerrier*, 1958; *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, 1961; *Les Stances à Sophie*, 1963). Narratively, these novels are characterized by a general adherence to novelistic tradition. They are realistic; characters are well defined and relationships among them are clear; events proceed linearly; an autodiegetic, female narrator controls the pace of the narrative; and the tension in each novel results from an individual's resistance to dictates of society. Of these novels Rochefort has commented, "C'était dans le temps de mon innocence littéraire et d'un temps où on raconte une histoire. . . . Et j'avais un style déguelasse. Et de toute façon, quand j'écrivais des livres à ce moment-là, c'était ma période d'étude." (Steckel, 164) Yet, the seeds of Rochefort's mature writing style are already present: irreverent voices of irony and dissent; narrative structuring through analepsis, repetition, and intensification; heavy intertextual weaving; varying levels of language usage, with particular attention to individualizing spoken language; splitting of the narrative voice; layering and shifting of tenses; voices of characters

serving as authorial masks; complicity with the reader; and an overall dialogic context.

A second group of novels, published from 1966 until 1978, is clearly marked by the events, attitudes and discourse of those pivotal years in French society. In them, there is a notable shift from focus on the plight of a single individual to interest in a group of individuals and their reactions against situations and preconceptions perceived as unacceptable. Included in this period are *Une Rose pour Morrison*, 1966; *Printemps au parking*, 1967; *Archao ou le jardin étincelant*, 1972; and *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, 1975; and Rochefort's autobiographical experiment, *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 1978. The third-person narrator in three of these novels is extradiegetic, and whether s/he is male or female is unclear and unimportant. In a fourth, the first-person, homodiegetic narrator is male. An increased element of fantasy resides in all of the novels of this period. Two, in fact, are utopian in theme. All are characterized by a heightened sense of ambiguity and even anonymity surrounding the speaking voices within the diegesis. Although metatextual commentary is present in Rochefort's first novel, *Le Repos du guerrier*, it is in these later novels that the novelist begins to develop more fully this aspect of her writing style. More frequently, the narrative voice becomes self-reflective as the act of narrating itself is brought to the attention of the reader.

The third, and final, period of Rochefort's novelistic creation is inscribed by an increased narrative complexity, a marked tendency for narrative self-consciousness, and a return to her earlier penchant for an autodiegetic, first-person narrator. During the last fifteen years of her life, Rochefort published five more

novels: *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*, 1982; *La Porte du fond*, 1988; *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, 1984; *Conversations sans paroles*, 1997; and *Adieu Andromède*, 1997. Again, one of the narrators is male. The narrative voice increasingly assumes multiple personae. In several of her earlier novels, the narrating character experiences a split or change of perspective as a result of an experience or experiences that force a certain self-awareness. In her later novels, however, the narrating voice itself vacillates between roles as purveyor of the diegesis, as participating character, and as commentator. Often confusion or disorientation can result for the reader as both the narrating voice and the voices of the characters become enmeshed and entwined with little or no indication of who is speaking. The tendency to include ambiguous and anonymous voices is matched by attention to messages hidden behind the spoken words, within other physical signs, and in the silences of the unspoken. Increasingly, there emerges a sense of urgency to communicate by whatever means. Rochefort's boldness in broaching controversial themes continues and even reaches into areas often considered taboo, particularly from the pen of a female writer (specifically, sado-masochism and incest). Yet, however dark and threatening her choice of theme, Rochefort's treatment of it remains ironically humorous. Through the mockery, an underlying optimism persists throughout most of Rochefort's fictional railing against repressive individuals, attitudes and institutions.

## NOTES

1. Notably, the group of writers who came to be called "new novelists."
2. Gerald Prince gives the following definition of "antinarrative" in his *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987): "A (verbal or nonverbal) text adopting the trappings of narrative but systematically calling narrative logic and narrative conventions into question; an *antistory*. Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* and Beckett's *Molloy* are antinarratives." (Chatman, 1978).
3. The desire for individual expression has always been inherent in literature, and as Walter Benjamin observed in 1936, the birthplace of the novel "is the solitary individual." ("The Storyteller," 87) That solitary individual, in his personal crisis of identity and fulfillment, haunts the pages of novels from every era. One can look as far back as Beroul's and Thomas' accounts of *Tristan et Yseut*, Chrétien de Troyes' *La Mort du roi Artu* and Rabelais' *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. In the 17th century, in Madame de la Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, a young woman's individual crisis pits her against social conventions of her day. In the eighteenth century, notable examples of the individual's determined struggle for self-actualization can be found in Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, Marivaux's *Le Paysan parvenu*, Diderot's *La Religieuse*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and even Voltaire's *Candide* and *Zadig*, to mention only a few. The nineteenth century's array of unforgettable novelistic heroes striving to achieve a sense of self within the framework of a politically and economically turbulent society, constrained by myth and convention, includes such forceful characterizations as those of René, Adolphe, Indiana, Eugénie Grandet, Julien Sorel, Gervaise Macquart, and Emma Bovary. This trend has persisted and intensified in the twentieth century with a predominance of first-person narratives characterized by a heightened awareness of the pervasive power of language to interpellate and determine subjectivity or alterity. Pertinent to this trend in modern literature, eight of Rochefort's eleven novels are written in first person.
4. In coining this term, Doubrovsky designates writing that, like psychoanalysis, takes place beyond the distinction between confession and invention. For him, the meaning of life does not exist anywhere to be discovered; it must be invented or constructed. He explains that "autofiction is the fiction of myself that I have decided, as a writer, to give of myself, incorporating the experience of analysis, in the full sense of the word, not only in thematics but also in the production of the text." ("Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse." 96)

### CHAPTER 3 ROCHEFORT'S EARLY NOVELS

"C'était dans le temps de mon innocence littéraire. . ."  
(Christiane Rochefort, interview 1975)

In *Le Repos du guerrier*, Geneviève serves as the first-person, autodiegetic narrator. She begins with an interior monologue the sense of which will become clear when it is taken up again on the last pages of the novel. Following her opening monologue regarding her present state of mind, Geneviève begins a retrospective tale of her agonizing relationship with a man she had met by chance encounter. Her experiences with this stranger force her to reexamine her own attitudes, values, fears and desires.

There is then, from the beginning, a splitting process as the present narrator judges her former self and begins to relate the situations and events that will comprise the narrative. As she describes herself, the imagery is always from the point of view of the other, of the man Renaud with whom she has established a master-slave relationship, or of her "other" self. The existence of this other self is the result of a metamorphosis brought on by her desire for Renaud, desire that she labels in the only acceptable terms that 1950's French society permits a well-brought-up young woman to speak: love. She relates that,

je ressens une délivrance d'accouchée. . . Mon ventre me fait mal.  
Une bête chaude y habite depuis une minute et déjà prend



place, ce monstre se dilate, et c'est moi. Le moi qui, toute ma vie, a nié le coup de foudre, le coup de foudre vient de le tuer. (43)

She talks of her *nouveau moi*, her *nouvelle peau*, and her *nouveau monde*.

Her perspective on life changes completely as she explains that, "une fois posée la ligne de force de l'amour, on voit que le monde est gouverné par la magie et non par la raison." (45)

In reference to Renaud, she notes that, "il n'écoute pas ce que je dis, il le regarde; c'est une impression très curieuse, comme si j'existais à côté de moi." (59)

A bit later she acknowledges that, "je ne me regardais plus que dans Renaud." (65)

She also experiences a physical split: into mind versus body or physical desire as opposed to reason. She tries to explain that, "mon corps, pendant ce temps-là, est contre la porte, collé, il hurle, je hurle comme un chien. Je l'avais oublié celui-là. . .

. C'est pourtant moi aussi cette chair douloureuse." (72) The use of two different

subject pronouns, *il* and *je*, as well as the demonstrative *celui-là*, grammatically

indicate her split perspective with regard to self. The immediate result of this sensation of a divided self is imaginary dialogue between the two halves of herself.

Speaking in familiar terms, using the *tu* form as she addresses her other self, the voice of desire chastises and tries to bring under control the reasoning self: "vois ce que tu as fait? dit l'autre. Tu l'as chassé. . . . Tu as tout nié, tu l'as nié; tu t'étonnes qu'il parte?" (72) This technique of splitting the narrating voice into multiple aspects

of the same personality and placing them in dialogic opposition with one another will be further developed later on by Nathalie Sarraute in *Enfance* and by Marguerite Duras in *l'Amant*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Rochefort's 1959 novel can effectively be read as opening

a kind of dialogue with these later novels from the standpoint of narrative treatment of voice.

Geneviève attempts to make clear her schizophrenic dilemma by confessing blatantly that, "il y aura deux Geneviève: Mlle Le Theil; un fossé creusé au bulldozer; et puis la Maîtresse de Sarti. Les deux ne se connaissent pas, se méprisent, se renient. 'Je suis une vraie femme', dit l'une, et l'autre: 'Tu es une obsédée sexuelle'." (90) Renaud, however, interprets her struggle differently, seeing a fundamental denial of her self in the unacknowledged desire to conform. In a passage of direct discourse, Renaud's language "shows" or acts out through syntactical and stylistic means the splitting apart or breakdown that is characteristic of the schizophrenic condition to which he refers.

Schizophrénie! Bourgeoisie, voilà le nom de ton mal. Le réel, connais pas: m'arrange pas connais pas. Veux pas le savoir. Et que la fête continue. (278)

Renaud speaks in fragments, splitting apart sentences. He breaks the negative form and verbalizes only *pas*. He declares that she does not exist in the real world, and doesn't want to. In an instance of free indirect narration, Renaud mimicks Geneviève's speech: *Le réel, connais pas. . . . Veux pas le savoir*. Then, by omitting the subject pronoun *tu* from his utterances, he effectively effaces her subjectivity in language as well. Schizophrenia, in fact, will be a recurrent theme in Rochfortian fiction.

The division within the narrative voice is paralleled further by the novel's basic structure. The novel is separated into two parts, each having five numbered chapters. The second half represents the metaphorical death of Geneviève's illusions,

illusions about the nature of being feminine, about love, about Renaud's power over her, about how to live. It begins with her account of her last will and testament, and continues with language and figures of death until the end. At one point Geneviève ruminates that,

il fallait s'occuper les mains, ou les dents, ou Dieu sait quoi; remplir un trou quelque part, qui n'avait pas de nom. Je le savais, ce nom, moi – et j'eusse donné ma tête à couper qu'il ne s'agissait pas de l'amour, comme le croyait Simone, mais de quelque chose de beaucoup plus trouble et indéfinissable, d'une échappatoire, toujours la même, ce désir de tourner le dos à la réalité, de se perdre, de se détruire, et qui était peut-être, tout au fond, l'attrait de la mort. (236)

The interior debate that she carries on with regard to her sense of self and her relationship with Renaud Sarti is played out additionally in the second half of the novel through the creation by the novel's characters of a play reworking the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. The narrating voice of Geneviève relates that,

du coup, devenant Eurydice, dans un renversement hardi de la légende je me mis en quête d'Orphée. . . . Pour lyre, j'avais mon propre coeur. . . . Eurydice emploierait tous les moyens. Elle essaierait de séduire. . . . Orphée essayait de chanter les vieux airs d'autrefois; mais c'était hideusement faux, hélas! Il ne savait plus. La voix d'Orphée serait déformée...inversée, dépouillée des harmoniques, blanchie 'comme celle d'un mort'. " (219-220)

In an interesting over-lapping of personalities, Orpheus is spoken by Renaud who functions also as a masked voice for Rochefort. Here "he" is depicted as a frustrated figure who vainly tries to go along with the traditional, or "les vieux airs d'autrefois" but, in his mouth, the words seem false. His voice becomes distorted and empty under the tension of this constraint. Geneviève, in the role of Eurydice, goes in quest for Orpheus, reversing the roles of the characters in the legend. Now she can be seen to represent what is past, outdated. The music of her lyre falls flat and is

no longer able to seduce. It is not out of tune with the present. To force this tired model on Orpheus only results in a deadening of his voice. Orpheus, rendered by the traditional myth as symbolic of the notion of romantic love that saves lost souls, has now become the object of Eurydice's quest. In this inversion of the myth, Eurydice represents that romantic notion and she desires that Orpheus give voice to her music. As does Eurydice, *Genève* tries every means to attain that embodiment of romantic love promised by the myth, believing that her life and her "self" will be transformed by it. Like Eurydice in the revised rendition of the play, however, she will meet with disappointment and disillusionment. When Eurydice later finds Orpheus' dismembered body, she vainly tries to reassemble it. Her failure to put his body back together also parallels *Geneviève*'s experience of failure in trying to put Renaud's life back together, to "mainstream" him into society.

Renaud's loss of voice foreshadows a later passage of *Geneviève*'s narration in which she will reflect, "disait Renaud, qui disait, qui disait, mais ne faisait toujours rien, que dire, jusqu'au moment où il fut frappé d'une extinction de voix à peu près totale."(253) (An earlier foreshadowing occurs at the end of chapter four in Part One of the novel as *Geneviève* notes to herself: "nous rentrâmes en silence. Renaud était frappé de mutisme.")(118) On a metatextual level, this failure and loss of voice can also be understood as a breakdown of traditional narrative. The "old tunes" just don't seem to "ring true" anymore.

Because Rochefort chose the voice of a female protagonist to narrate many of her novels, in first person, readers and some critics have tended to identify that character's voice as a mask of Rochefort's own. While the writer has confirmed that

aspects of various characters in her novels do indeed reflect her own life experience or philosophy, those reflections do not always issue from the character to whom she has given the narrating voice. In the case of *Le Repos du guerrier*, Rochefort has made it clear that her female protagonist is not to be considered the author's mouthpiece. Rather, she insists, "I didn't identify at all with the woman who narrates in the first person. Everyone assumed I was her, but that's not me at all. . . . It's clear that the character who speaks for me in the novel is the man." (*Shifting Scenes*, 177)

Rochefort identifies with her character whom she portrays as marginal or unconventional. The man, Renaud, is a social dropout who rebelliously pits himself against what he sees as senseless dictates of society. During the 1950's, promiscuous sex, alcohol abuse and cigarettes were the primary vices through which people displayed decadence and flaunted disregard for social norms. Renaud wallows in self-deprecating sentiment. While he considers himself superior in his obstinate refusal to conform, he seems to masochistically enjoy his misery. He pompously rails, "le mortel ne meurt pas, il survit. Comme on survit à la bombe atomique, le corps définitivement irradié, l'âme planant sur la face de l'abîme des molécules potentiellement désintégrées, sur le vide essentiel." (76) As for Geneviève, he sarcastically belittles her naiveté and willing objectivity: "regarde-moi un peu, sérieusement, c'est toujours toi que tu regardes, change l'objectif, mets un long foyer . . . envisage où tu fourres tes pieds. . . si tu crois que l'amour est un bouclier, tu te trompes, c'est une brèche." (77) Renaud's speech is authoritative and replete with metaphor. Like Rochefort whose voice he masks, he is a sensitive and intelligent

soul prone to flights of imagination. His language is familiar and marked by derision, *le rire populaire* directed at Geneviève and her naive fantasy that "love conquers all."

Reminiscent of Rimbaud's famous "je suis un autre," Rochefort has tried to explain her narrative treatment of this character by saying,

ce que je voulais c'était montrer *Je voyant Il* avec les yeux de l'incompréhension. Bien qu'écrit à la première personne, ce n'est pas du tout un roman autobiographique. Moi, c'est *Il*. Ce qu'il dit, c'est moi qui le dis. Comme lui, j'aime délirer verbalement. Mais je ne suis pas alcoolique. (*Visages d'Aujourd'hui*, 39)

Renaud, however, has a double in this novel, Rafaele, who appears only in the last third of the book. The image of doubling is important, subtly underscoring the duality inherent in human nature and serving as counterpoint to the theme of schizophrenia in the character of Geneviève. Geneviève notes that, "elle lui ressemblait comme une soeur"(204), and that, in fact, "c'était lui-même."(269) Rafaele is a seductively androgynous figure whom the narrator characterizes by: "son allure entre fille et garçon ou plutôt les deux ensemble."(223) A woman, she nevertheless dresses in somewhat masculine clothes (no bra, a man's shirt, pants); her hair is cropped short; her voice is rough and aggressive; and her mannerisms are similar to Renaud's (the way she sits, for example, crossing her ankle over her knee). She is variously referred to by the narrator as: *double*, *asexuée*, *soeur*, *fée*, *sorcière*, *enfant*, *chevalier*, *copain*, *chat*, *bébé*, *bas-bleu*, *demi-folle*, *bouc égaré*, *chevreau*, *agneau*, *sacrifice*, *ange*, and *muse*. In a later interview Rochefort acknowledged that her voice is masked behind this double as well.

Je voulais écrire ça de mon point de vue à moi; celui qui est devenu dans le livre Rafaele. (Hurtin, 9)

There is, then, a second splitting of voice, setting up an additional site of tension within a character. Rafaele's more tempered voice may be understood to represent the mystical, intuitive, and creative aspect of Renaud. Subsequent to his acquaintance with her and under her influence, Renaud experiences transformations in his personality, emerging as a writer figure, pianist and *bon vivant*. Geneviève relates:

"Ce" Renaud écrivait. Etait gai. . . Ce Renaud aimait la musique. . .  
 "Ce" Renaud, en pleine santé physique sinon mentale, dévorait,  
 laissait du whisky dans ses verres. . . Il vivait. . . Et ce Renaud  
 soudain révéla ce n'était pas le mien, c'était celui de Rafaele. (222)

Except for occasional, fragmented responses to demands voiced by Renaud, the voice of Geneviève remains locked in the narration. Renaud's voice dominates; it scorns, protests, ridicules, even philosophizes. Long passages are devoted to his pessimistically existential voice argumentatively and negatively holding forth on the pointlessness of human, and particularly his own, existence:

Et moi, j'aime ce qui est beau. A défaut du reste. Surtout quand c'est flou. Flou, tout est beau . . . j'aime le flou, le vague, le brumeux, l'estompé, le on ne sait pas très bien ce que c'est, alors rend-toi compte du travail! Je gomme, je floute, je filoute, je file; à l'acide, au couteau, à l'esprit-de-sel, à l'esprit-de-vin. (80)

Geneviève's narrating voice works around his spoken voice in the relative silence of her recounted memory of their tormented relationship.

Je ne pouvais vraiment plus prétendre ne pas savoir, et Renaud s'agaçait de mon silence. Il me provoquait. "Qu'est-ce que tu regardes!" Je le regardais se verser du vin avec cette promptitude discrète qui avait longtemps trompé mon attention. "Tes mains." – "Qu'est-ce qu'elles ont mes mains?" Ses mains tremblaient. "Tu as de belles mains", soupirai-je, car je pensais: quel dommage, de si belles mains, trembler. . . "Ah oui?" Il suivait parfaitement tout l'arrière-plan de cette conversation.(100-101)

Renaud reads through her words as we do. He interprets her gestures and her gaze along with her silence. Her spoken words tiptoe around his aggressive outbursts in an effort to preserve her fantasies and illusions concerning Renaud.

As she gradually comes to know Renaud Sarti, and consequently herself through her relationship with him, Geneviève finally realizes that at the bottom of all the personal anguish she has experienced is the ultimate dilemma for all people. Echoing Renaud's words, she notes, "mais comment vivre, c'est la question." (222) In a final twist of situational irony at the end of the novel, Renaud apparently abandons his obstinate refusal to conform to society's expectations. He gives up and gives in (as Hutton suggests, he effectively loses the voice that has characterized him from the beginning) saying,

je ne veux pas faire ce que je veux, passe-moi les menottes, je t'en prie. Je ne veux pas de la liberté, de la liberté de rien . . . je veux dire Bonjour Comment allez-vous Très bien merci et vous, je veux aller moi aussi dans la grande Machine à Laver, aide-moi, toi qui sais cela. Aide-moi à vivre. Force-moi à vivre. . . . Epouse-moi. S'il te plaît. (284-285)

Renaud sarcastically criticizes conformity in his use of the word "handcuffs" and his mocking repetition of the standard formula of politeness "Hello How are you Very well thank you and you." The image of the washing machine points to a bourgeois consumer society as well as to the standardizing effect of mass production. It is an image that Geneviève also uses when she refers to "that machinery" in the following quote. Both feel the impact not only of technology and modern, persuasive advertising but of the intangible myths that propel society's people in directions they might not choose if left to their own imaginations and inclinations.



Geneviève's goal of self-fulfillment through love, and success as loving redeemer of the wayward and cynical Renaud, seems finally at hand. Yet, as she discovers, this too is only an illusion. Paradoxically, and apparently by her own doing, the man she loved now no longer exists. He has been silenced. Further, Renaud's surrender will leave her still powerless and still enslaved. In a sense, as she comments, he has won.

La puissance légale dont il m'a munie, c'est lui seul qui en use,  
comme d'une béquille pour s'aider à aller où il veut aller. . . . Il a  
besoin de cette machinerie, je ne suis qu'un instrument, je joue le rôle  
qu'il m'a donné. C'est lui qui fait tout, pas moi. Moi je ne fais rien,  
je n'ai rien fait, ce n'est pas moi, ce n'est pas moi, je le jure. (286)

The crisis of identity that has beleaguered both characters throughout the text is unresolved. In a chapter replete with lexicon and imagery of death, the final death metaphor, and the last line of the text, belongs to Céline's hedonistic friend Alex who tries in vain to comfort her by saying, "allez viens, ce n'est tout de même pas la chaise électrique." (286) But, in a sense, it is. The *repos du guerrier* of the title takes on a double meaning: not only the woman as the rest and recreation of the weary warrior, but the end of the "battle," and the symbolic demise of the warriors themselves. As Renaud comments, "toi tu es le repos du guerrier, du guerrier lâche. . . . Je veux dormir-mourir, et pour ça une femme c'est le meilleur système. L'amour c'est une euthanasie." (234) Rochefort has commented, "maybe she destroys Renaud by wanting to integrate him: 'you must do something in life, you must conform.' She sends him to the clinic for detoxification, and it is like a murder. She understands that she has killed him as a poet, as a dropout, as a free person." (Hirsch, 119)

Circling back to Geneviève's narrating voice on the opening page of the novel, the sense of her earlier ruminations now becomes clear. The affair is over; Renaud is gone; she is again alone. Speaking in images of war, the narrator acknowledges that her outward "victory" is based on "des ruines" and leaves her only a sense of malaise. Her illusions shattered, she must accept the responsibility for living her own life. She states categorically,

il faut brûler ce passé une bonne fois, comme de vieilles lettres, et qu'on n'y pense plus; il faut que je quitte Renaud, puisque aussi bien lui-même s'est quitté. Et continuer. Dans le même sens. Et vivre. Avec ce que j'ai. Que j'ai voulu. (9)

Thus, as is characteristic in much of Rochefort's writing, the open ending at the novel's conclusion does not bring a resolution of the tension. The writer has taken no clear stance on either Renaud's or Geneviève's position. Rather, the disillusionment of both characters sets the stage for yet another complex human struggle.

Even as the voice of Geneviève begins her retrospective narrative, Rochefort subtly weaves in, from time to time, voices of other characters within the diegesis. In a sort of hybrid construction that Bakhtin would refer to as heteroglossic, double-voiced discourse, the voice of the narrator becomes inflected by that of one or more of the characters. Such is the case, for instance, during a confrontation between Geneviève and the provincial desk clerk at a local hotel. After suspiciously implying that she must have promiscuous intentions, first because she was traveling alone in a strange town, and additionally because she was reporting an alleged key mix-up involving the room of a male patron, the clerk makes lame excuses for his behavior and then, conveniently, changes the subject. At this point, Geneviève lapses again

into her interior monologue. As she ruminates internally over the conversation that has just ensued between them, their two voices become enmeshed.

voilà. Changeons le sujet. Il ne l'avait pas connue elle, mais par contre Charles, mon oncle en somme, qui venait faire sa partie en face, là vous voyez. Il désignait le café de la Gare, où j'aurais pu, aussi bien, descendre, pensai-je avec quelque regret. Ils possédaient des immeubles en ville, n'est-ce pas? Et puis cette maison; elle avait un très beau parc, que longeait malheureusement, à présent, la déviation des poids lourds. C'est par là aussi qu'on allait faire le motel, vous savez, ces casernes sur le bord des routes, la nouvelle mode. . . (23)

Slipping back and forth from present tense to past, Geneviève recalls snatches of the desk clerk's nosey and condescendingly familiar remarks about her relatives' real estate affairs. Undistinguished in the flow of the narration, the voice of the clerk is, nonetheless, discernable. Some of his comments are reported indirectly, for example: *Il ne l'avait pas connue elle, mais par contre Charles, mon oncle en somme, qui venait faire sa partie en face*. Other parts of the narrative represent the narrator's own thoughts: *où j'aurais pu, aussi bien, descendre*. Still others represent the clerk's exact words: *là, vous voyez; n'est-ce pas?*; and *vous savez*. The subtle mockery resonating from this repetition of the clerk's inept attempt to establish a complicitous accord with Geneviève, instead, has the effect of encouraging collusion between the narrator and her implied *narrataire*. There is even, in the mocking sarcasm with regard to the new-style lodging for travelers beginning to appear all over France in the forties and fifties, an echo of the Rochefort's own voice of disdain for modern architecture: *le motel . . . ces casernes sur le bord des routes, la nouvelle mode*. . . Thus, the narrating voice is not as straightforward as it might at first

appear. It is a dialogic complex of voices from among which narrative tension develops.

The voices of the text can be separated into two basic groups: those of the bourgeois figures (Geneviève, her fiancé Pierre, her mother, and her friend Claude) and those of the more bohemian characters (Renaud, the artist Katov and the free-spirited Rafaele). As Bakhtin has suggested for the novelistic genre in general, the discourse of the characters can be understood as a culturally contingent mix, having a social, historical and cultural context and constituting an expression of an ideology. On a fundamental level, the crux of the tension in this novel resides in the conflicting ideologies espoused by these two groups of characters representing two different sectors of 1950's French society. Although all sectors of French society, including the bourgeoisie (and especially intellectuals), were touched by Communist ideology and activity, Rochefort positions the character Renaud and his companions as representative of this line of thought.

The theme of love is recurrent in Rochefortian fiction. Here, Geneviève's idealistic and archetypal view of love as a selfless and transforming power is poised against Renaud's cynical denial of love's emotional aspect in favor of only ephemeral, narcissistic, and sexual pleasure. Renaud's bitter nihilism is directly related to the social and historical context from which he derives. A disillusioned adherent to communist philosophy, Renaud's existential despair is linked to the difficulties experienced by the communist party in France since the 1940's when news of Russian labor camps became known. The Cold War with its ever-threatening atomic confrontation and escalating Russian aggression in eastern Europe marked

the decade of the 1950's, increasing tension and creating, for some, a sense of fatality and impending doom. The voice of Renaud viciously attacks Geneviève with:

on survit à la bombe atomique, le corps définitivement irradié, l'âme planant sur la face de l'abîme des molécules potentiellement désintégrées, sur le vide essentiel. . . . Il est temps que tu saches où tu es et ce que tu es en train de faire parce que jusqu'à présent tu n'y comprends pas grand-chose il faut le dire. Car ils sont mortels pour leurs semblables, que l'amour même, Geneviève, ne protège pas. . . . Ne protège pas. (76-77)

His disdain is relentless. He scornfully announces that, "un jour j'écirais un traité. Je l'appellerai 'De l'Amour'. . . et je serai contre. J'y démontrerai que l'amour n'existe pas." (84)

Current ideologies also gain a voice in Rochefort's novels as narrators and characters repeat clichés. In *Le Repos du guerrier*, most of them come from the acerbic mouth of Renaud. As Céline notices, "voilà Renaud. Sur le velours. Le beau velours des formules avec un si grand air de vérité." (71) Most often these are situated within the narration or within dialogue in such a way that their claim to self-evident truth only rings hollow. As Rochefort notes, "pour les clichés ils sont exprès, mais si possible, ils sont pervertis . . . c'est la voix plutôt de la société qui les dit, pour beaucoup de ces clichés et généralités." (Steckel, 167-168) Rochefort's fiction, then, functions most often to debunk these ideas circulating as obvious truth.

Rochefort's novels are richly permeated with other impersonal voices that contribute to the polyphonic nature of the text and, in Bakhtinian terms, to its *dialogism*. Within the culturally contingent mix constituting the discourse of the novel, for example, intertextual allusions and citations situate points from which

Rochefort's text interfaces or "dialogues" with other, preceding texts. Bakhtin has demonstrated that this narrative technique functions to expand potential meaning beyond the confines of the present text by setting up implicit centers of authority to parallel or conflict with those made more explicit through direct narration and characterization. Rochefort's novels incorporate a wide variety of intertextual references including such sources as: the Bible, works of literature, music, psychology, art, science, history, philosophy, and even political documents.

*Le Repos du guerrier* is particularly rich in intertextual material. Rochefort's first novel, in fact, sets a standard for her subsequent work with its numerous biblical, literary and musical references. It could be ranked among the four most complex and sophisticated of her novels in this regard with eight instances of both musical and biblical intertext and at least forty that are literary. Interestingly, all of the biblical allusions are made in reference to Renaud. He is variously likened to a *statue de sel* (1, 51, 237), to *Saint Michel Archange* battling the demons (160), to Jonas hiding in the belly of the whale (242), and to the *pharisien* who was advised: "regarde ta poutre avant d'ôter ma paille." (243) Another is used in reference to Renaud's double, Rafaele: *l'Ange de la Résurrection*. (262) The quantity and sophistication of intertextual references, or voices, appearing in Rochefort's novels presupposes a reader who is also versed in the arts and who is thereby capable of "getting the message."

Perhaps the most important of the musical intertext in *Le Repos du guerrier* is the reference to Monteverdi's opera *Orpheo*. As Margaret-Anne Hutton has discerningly illustrated, the musical intertext impacts significantly on possible

meaning to be derived from the diegesis if read as a metadiegetic *mise en abyme* when it is taken up by the characters for the creation of a mini-play. It is the death of Orpheus that makes this interpretation work. Hutton suggests that,

to read *Eurydice* as a "mise en abyme" of *Le Repos*, is to gain an insight into how to interpret the text's conclusion: Geneviève's unremitting love will prove to be fatal, rather than redemptive; Renaud will be robbed of his voice, and will suffer a metaphorical death at the hands of Geneviève. (*The Novels of Christiane Rochefort*, 30)

Her reading becomes particularly significant in light of Rochefort's acknowledgement that the character, Renaud, represents one of her authorial masks.

Rochefort's life-long appreciation of music encompassed a wide spectrum of types including classical, jazz, popular, and folk, all of which she has integrated into her fiction.<sup>2</sup> In *Le Repos du guerrier*, for example, there are references not only to Monteverdi, but to the classical music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. These references are not innocent or incidental; all are subtly suggestive in the same way that Monteverdi's opera suggests a metatextual reading. Although she does not explain her action, for example, Geneviève avoids selecting recordings by Beethoven, probably because she knows that Renaud will sneer at any choice of classical romantic music. Instead she chooses *La Jeune Fille et la mort* by Schubert, again a *mise en abyme* of her own relationship with Renaud. Later, in a pastiche of the folk song *Le Bon Roi Dagobert*, Rafaele amuses her companions by composing new words: "le Roi Renaud de guerre vint—tenant ses tripes dans sa main. . . . Ni de la femme ni du fils/ je ne saurais me réjouir. . . . Et quand on fut à la mi-nuit/ le Roi Renaud rendit l'esprit." (262)

Intertextual weaving of literary "voices" in *Le Repos du guerrier* again incorporates a full gamut of cultural levels from popular comic strips, detective novels and film to theater, classical antiquity, philosophy, and nineteenth century romanticism. Tintin and Gigi find a place as do the mythical personalities Pan, Caliban, Hercules and Icarus. Novelists such as Laclos, Sade and Restif who are noted for sexual themes share textual space with detective sleuths Sherlock Holmes and Hadley Chase. Cervantes, Dante, Bergson and Heidegger figure as oblique voices in the polyglot of Rochefort's text. Seemingly casual use of the lexicon of theater combines with Geneviève's allusion to Antoin Artaud in her remark, "j'étais assoiffée de vengeance et je faisais mes classes de cruauté"(164) and in theatrical metaphors such as:

cette dramaturgie chaotique qu'était la vie de Renaud Sarti et qu'il croyait créer quand il la subissait. C'était une *Commedia dell'arte*, ou plutôt une *Tragedia dell'arte*, ou mieux encore, les deux ensemble, lui dans la comédie, moi dans la tragédie et jamais sur le même ton, j'arrivais dans un rôle une fois pour toutes fixé, Pantalon Boy-scout, mais dont le texte restait à improviser en scène, de quoi Renaud se chargeait, brochant et rebrodant selon la disposition du public ou celle de son humeur.(115)

Renaud repeats the nineteenth-century romantic refrain "elle est morte en me donnant la vie,"(89) and Geneviève alludes to Paul Verlaine's "de la musique avant toute chose."(238) Geneviève reflects, "j'étais tout bonnement en train de claquer mon héritage en débauches à la façon d'un héritier romantique du XIXe siècle. . ."(244)

Rochefort's knowledge is wide-ranging in all of the arts, especially literary. All of these allusions and citations have been carefully selected and function as extratextual voices that create tension by evocatively contesting, expanding,



illustrating, or parodying characters, actions and situations within her novels. Commenting on the nine different references to *Don Quixote* in this novel, for example, Rochefort once remarked, "ce n'est pas pour rien que je l'ai montré lisant *Don Quichotte*. Renaud est un Don Quichotte raté, sur-raté. Il n'a même pas le pouvoir de l'illusion." (Bourdette, 39) Her novel *Le Repos du guerrier* orchestrates voices emanating from mythological references such as Pan, the Grail, Hercules, and Icarus, all of which comment on the character of Renaud. "Je suis la réincarnation du grand Pan," he announces. (169) Geneviève confesses that, "chercher Renaud, c'est mon lot en ce monde, mon pauvre Graal personnel . . ." (137), and that, "la joie de Renaud me faisait Hercule. . . ." (255) By the end of the novel, Renaud admits, "je suis tombé. . . . Toute l'affaire est que je me suis cru un dieu, que je bois pour essayer d'y croire, mais c'est pas vrai, finissons-en avec ces fantaisies icariennes à la con." (283) Renaud's obsession with detective novels underscores his escapism and obstinate refusal to face life around him. The narrator refers to Renaud as "ce Sherlock Holmes" (48) and later notes, "il est là, il lit Hadley Chase, rien d'autre n'existe." (68) Often these references are a source of Rochefort's ironic humor, as in the following passage of Geneviève's narration:

je me sentais très loin de lui. J'absorbai deux comprimés et je cachai les tubes entre *L'Imaginaire* et *L'Être et le néant*, un endroit où Renaud n'irait jamais les chercher. (136)

The titles of the two books mentioned offer portraits in miniature or metaphors of the novel's two primary characters, Geneviève and Renaud, respectively. Further, the narrator sarcastically implies that such weighty reading

matter would not interest Renaud who prefers to escape into the domain of pulp fiction.

In reference to the two major characters in Rochefort's *Le Repos du Guerrier*, both have quite distinctive Christian names, which catch the reader's attention more than, say, Robert, Josiane and Céline. Renaud alludes to the great warrior hero of *Chanson de geste*, Renaud de Montauban, and to his later incarnation as Rinaldo in Tasso's "Gerusalemme liberata" where the warrior is tempted and provisionally unmanned by the magician-temptress Armida. The leading 20th century reworking of that theme is Cocteau's drama "Renaud et Armide." Genèviève would be recognized by educated native French people as Saint Genèviève of Paris or Genieve of Brabant, heroine of a children's legend. In both cases, she is sweet and innocent.

The figure of the writer that appears frequently in Rochefortian novels provides an embodiment of a metatextual voice that often echoes Rochefort's own, while additionally articulating issues of concern to writers in general, particularly writers of this century. Renaud's destructive attitude concerning his writing, for example, prompts an acquaintance to remark, "tes oeuvres ne t'appartiennent plus,"(176) echoing Barthes' pronouncement of the death of the author in favor of the concept of "scriptor." ("The Death of the Author," cited in *Contemporary Critical Theory* by Dan Latimer) The scriptor, whose hand is detached from any individual voice, merely mingles the writings of others resulting in the creation of a text that is: "a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture."(57) Thus, as Barthes explains, the significance of any writing resides in the site where

this multiplicity is collected, the reader, and his unilateral response to the vehicle of that writing, language itself.

In *Le Repos du guerrier* Renaud is a pseudo-writer: "parce qu'on le rencontrait dans les milieux littéraires, qu'il pérerait et ingurgitait superbement, tout le monde prenait d'emblée Renaud pour un écrivain." (174) Although his acquaintances still adhere to the myth of the writer as originator, Renaud sees himself as a sort of juggler or acrobatic trickster: "je ne suis qu'un bateleur." (181) Unfortunately, Renaud's juggling act totally lacks creativity and only proves to be an exercise in banality. When Geneviève finally has an opportunity to see some of the writing that Renaud has carefully hidden in a drawer of his writing table, she finds just a single page on which is repeatedly inscribed, "la marquise sortit à cinq heures." (274) The famous phrase evokes the voice of Paul Valéry, rejecting the notion of a "realist" novel and insisting on the need to write differently. Its inclusion also allows Rochefort indirectly to voice her agreement with Valéry's concept and force the reader's attention onto the act of writing and narration. In a later passage of the novel, Renaud expounds on the subject of automatic writing in tones that echo Rochefort's own:

l'automatisme en soi, c'est de la blague. C'est le contenu qui a fait le surréalisme. Voyez: maintenant qu'il n'y a plus de position politique officielle parmi les artistes, autrement dit qu'ils sont tous officieusement des bourgeois, l'automatisme, c'est du vent. La vertu, c'était la révolte. Et maintenant, la révolte est sans espoir. (199)

For Rochefort, the act of writing is part of a process of consciousness-raising. She has said, "I think a writer is a kind of mirror and a vehicle which may provoke a more widespread movement. (*L'Esprit Créateur*, 120)

The voice of an autodiegetic, female narrator again provides the narrative thread for Rochefort's second novel, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*. As in *Le Repos du guerrier*, the narrator, Josyane, gives a retrospective account of people and events that helped to shape her young life. Her non-conformist voice, characterized by language that Rochefort has called "l'écrit-parlé," seems by its direct and familiar tone to address those similar to herself in age and situation. In the following passage criticizing older, married women, for example, characteristics of colloquial speech are evident as the youthful narrator grumbles her mocking disapproval.

Bon Dieu ce que j'aimais pas les bonnes femmes! Comment une chose pareille peut-elle arriver à exister? Pourquoi c'est pas dans les zoos? Toute la journée ça geint, ça se traîne. . . . Je ne connais rien de plus inutile sur la terre que les bonnes femmes. Si. Ça pond. (91)

In imitating familiar speech, Rochefort frequently omits the negative particle *ne*. Fractional syntax and ellipses also often represent particularities of this familiar register of language. For example, in *pourquoi c'est pas dans les zoos?* Josyane purposefully avoids inversion or the interrogative expression *est-ce que*, relying solely on voice intonation to formulate the question. Repetition of the sarcastic tag *les bonnes femmes*, as well as disparaging reference to them by repetition of the uniquely condescending French pronoun *ça*, characterize popular or informal language. To further mark and emphasize the intended irony in the narrator's voice, Rochefort isolates *Ça pond*. Combining the image of women as farm hens, whose sole reason to exist is the production of eggs, more chickens, and more wealth, with the capitalization of the derogatory *Ça* creates a tone of caustic sarcasm.

The narrator's satirical irony is not restricted to women, however. Derisive irony surrounds all of the adults around her. Here the tone is much more light-

hearted and humorous than that which characterized *Le Repos du guerrier*, with its underlying motif of death and disillusionment. The humor and irony function to encourage complicity on the part of the reader, whether or not s/he is the implied peer of the young narrator. Often humor results directly from Rochefort's skillful handling of the youthful idiom, both in syntactical forms and vocabulary usage. Josyane's language reflects a blend of the spoken and written styles, particularly as the writer's own mature voice mingles with that of the child-narrator. The teacher in Josyane's catechism class, for example, requires that she memorize certain "facts." One of these is a statement offering an explanation or definition of God: "Dieu est un pur esprit infiniment parfait." (12) Although the other youngsters comply with the teacher's wishes and simply parrot the statement when prompted, the bewildered young narrator, resists.

Je n'avais pas pu répondre avec elles, je ne comprenais pas la phrase, pas un seul mot. Ça commençait mal. . . . Je ne sais pas ce qui s'est passé ce soir-là à la maison, qui a gueulé et sur qui, ce qu'on a mangé, et où est passée la vaisselle. Je retournais la phrase dans tous les sens, cherchant par quel bout la prendre; et je n'y arrivais pas. Blanc, lisse et fermé comme un oeuf, le Pur Esprit Infiniment Parfait restait là dans ma tête, je m'endormis avec sans avoir pu le casser. (12)

The sophistication evident in careful use of formal and complex verb tenses (*n'avais pas pu répondre, m'endormis, sans avoir pu*), adherence to standard syntactical structures, and comparison of the catechism phrase with specific aspects of an egg all point to a mature, educated voice, unlikely for the young narrator. The passage is sprinkled, however, with vocabulary and phrasing that could, indeed, represent elements of unrefined teen-age speech. Some of these include the use of

the verb *gueuler*, the dangling preposition *avec*, and the oral-style phrasing of *où est passé la vaisselle*.

Other linguistic markers of conversational or familiar language are phrases such as *et puis zut*, *en somme*, *c'est-à-dire*, *bref*, or *tiens* and slang expressions such as: *taper dans l'oeil* and *dans le coup*. Purposefully distorted spelling is used to reflect careless pronunciation common among the uneducated inhabitants of the HLMs. The use of these indicators, combined with formal verb tenses such as the past historic and the literary past anterior, results in a subtle humor as the reader notices the incongruity of their juxtaposition. The following sentence, for example, illustrates Rochefort's technique: "t'as tapé dans l'oeil à Didi, m'informa Liliane qui, ayant un an de plus que moi, était davantage dans le coup." (77) This blending of the written and spoken, what she calls the *écrit-parlé*, characterizes much of the narration in all of Rochefort's novels.

As in *Le Repos du guerrier*, and, in fact, in all of Rochefort's novels, the narrative voice, which appears to be written in "conventional" free indirect speech, is a heteroglossic amalgam of voices. In the passage that follows, for example, at least three voices combine and overlap.

Chantal alors marchait et commençait à parler, elle tirait sur la robe de ma mère et n'arrêtait pas de répéter: ou ti fère, où ti fère? On le lui avait promis. Ah! Laisse-moi donc tranquille, répondait la mère comme toujours, tu me fatigues! Donne ton nez que je te mouche. Souffle. Chantal était enrhumée: l'hiver, elle n'était qu'un rhume, d'un bout à l'autre, avec de temps en temps pour varier une bronchite ou une sinusite. Cette année-là les jumeaux avaient la coqueluche. (9)

Without indication by traditional markers, the voices of the narrator, of her baby sister Chantal, and of her mother can be distinguished within the narrative flow.

Clearly, after the colon, are words that represent the baby talk of her sister Chantal. Then breaking into the paragraph is the mother's voice, which the narrator indicates with the tag: *répondait la mère comme toujours*. What follows, however, is another instance of double-voicing, syntactically arranged in what Bakhtin refers to as a hybrid-construction.

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages', two semantic and axiological belief systems. (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 304)

The statement could, syntactically, be attributed either to the narrator or to her mother. It is a statement that typifies what Bakhtin further refers to as 'pseudo-objective motivation.' That is, a formal marker, such as the colon in this case, suggests that although the logic of the sentence is the narrator's, the utterance following the colon signals the words or the belief system of another character. Thus, *l'hiver, elle n'était qu'un rhume, d'un bout à l'autre, avec de temps en temps pour varier une bronchite ou une sinusite* represent words the narrator has heard her mother repeat, probably frequently, and to whomever would listen. Tension is generated as Josyane's resentment of her mother's unsympathetic attitude toward her own children is subtly mocked. The narrating voice of Josyane then resumes to continue the irony by relating flatly that, *cette année-là les jumeaux avaient la coqueluche*.

Although, in general, Josyane proves a more reliable narrator than Geneviève, problems may sometimes arise for the reader as inconsistencies creep into the narrative voice. This happens, for example, in the following passage.

Pourquoi, avec Philippe, rien que de marcher l'un près de l'autre, les doigts emmêlés, c'était quelque chose de merveilleux? Pourquoi lui? Et lui se demandait: Pourquoi elle? (115)

This autodiegetic narrator has no way of knowing what is in the mind of the other characters. She has not established herself as omniscient and is therefore incapable of reporting anything other than what the other characters do or verbalize. For the moment, she has stepped beyond the boundaries of her position as narrator-participant in the events she is recounting. Although she distances herself from most of the other characters by her scorn and ironic mockery, they are still textually side by side, and apparent to each other only by observable and audible means.

Occasionally, too, inconsistencies in the perspective of the narrating voice may create difficulty. As Margaret-Anne Hutton suggests,

attempts to analyse the apparently fluctuating narrative point of view—Josyane as spokeswoman for the author; Josyane as foil to the author's own irony—are further complicated by the fact that the focalization of the narrative shifts to embrace changes in Josyane's attitudes: descriptions and comments, in other words, may represent views which are subsequently superseded, a point underlined by repeated references to Josyane's growing up. (*The Novels of Christiane Rochefort*, 45-46)

At one point, for example, Josyane seems awed by the organization and construction of the new housing development at Sarcelles thinking, "ça c'est de l'architecture. Et ce que c'était beau! J'avais jamais vu autant de vitres. J'en avais des éblouissements. . . ." (95) Yet, only a short while later she already experiences the emotional discomfort that this over-sized and over-organized community imposes on the solitary individual. Without really understanding why she feels this way, she gasps,



il faisait trop clair, trop clair. J'étais nue comme un ver. Je cherchais de l'ombre, un coin, un coin noir, un coin où me cacher, j'avais la panique, une panique folle. . . . Désordre et ténèbres. J'aurais voulu une cabane à outils, un débarras, un placard à balais, une niche à chien; une caverne. Désordre et ténèbres, désordre et ténèbres, désordre et ténèbres. (96)

Rocheport's artistry with language is discernable in this revealing passage as Josyane's language lexically and syntactically acts out or represents her experience amidst these architectural behemoths. She is surrounded by rows of buildings, all neatly constructed in the same pattern, their multiple floors of apartments all configured with like floorplans, and standing starkly exposed on a site devoid of trees or other vegetation. The unnaturalness (insanity) of this design is mirrored in images of madness (*désordre et ténèbres*) and in Josyane's feelings of nakedness, low self-esteem (*comme un ver*) and panic. The power of the sheer number and size of the buildings surrounding her is recreated through repetition and intensification in the passage: *un coin, un coin noir, un coin où me cacher* and *la panique, une panique folle*. The dehumanizing effect imposed by these massive structures is represented by her desire to hide in any one of a series of small, dark places where *things* of little value are placed.

As to the question of whether the narrating voice of Josyane functions as spokeswoman for the author or as foil of the author's own irony, Rocheport has made conflicting comments about having used the narrator as her mouthpiece. Talking with Alice Jardine she insisted that, "the only material I took from my own experience was that for a short time I actually did live—or let's say tried to live—in a huge apartment complex when I was a sculptor. . . . Other than that, I don't really identify with the little girl in the story. I use my imagination instead." (*Shifting*

Scenes, 177) In another interview, however, with Marianne Hirsch, she admits that there is, "in *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, the little girl who is the narrator (and myself at the same time). . . ." (*L'Esprit Créateur*, 112) That her own voice moves about in the text as she uses one character or another as her spokesperson is well documented. In reference to *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* Rochefort writes,

Bien sûr je suis aussi quelque part là-dedans, mais où? C'est très variable.... La petite Josyane, je suis liée à elle, par la compassion si vous voulez. Et je suis aussi derrière elle, en train d'essayer (?) les possibilités qu'elle a d'être sauvée. Non, finalement. L' "amour" (faux, illusoire) aura sa peau. Moi je constate avec tristesse la puissance de l'oppression par l'urbanisme. On nous confond souvent avec nos personnages. Comme si on oubliait (?) que la littérature c'est une transposition. (*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 277-278)

This apparent inconsistency, the fluctuating point of view with regard to the Sarcelles community, parallels and underscores the irony inherent in the design of modern architecture: the powerful allure of its modernity against the dehumanizing effects of living within its stark and massive sameness. These residential conglomerates that were constructed during the years following World War II, to provide housing for lower and moderate-income families, were new, modern and seductively marketed with the promise of a better life for their occupants. Yet, even as they appeared superficially dazzling, (the narrator observes that, "c'était beau. Vert, blanc. Ordonné. On sentait l'organisation. Ils avaient tout fait pour qu'on soit bien, ils s'étaient demandé: qu'est-ce qu'il faut mettre pour qu'ils soient bien? Et ils l'avaient mis.") (97), they would prove later to be uninspiring and oppressive. As Rochefort observed from personal experience, these "carcasses en béton" have a depressing effect on those who live within their confines.

Ces trucs-là – le matériau? La forme? La pensée qui les a inspirés?  
 Coupent radicalement toute vie intérieure. . . . C'était, cette pensée  
 architecturale, une machine diabolique, machine de mort mentale.  
 (*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 257-8)

Rocheport's own experience of life in one of these concrete communities prompted her to write the novel. She relates in her autobiographical *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur* that she wrote it "d'une seule traite. Sur l'horreur." (260)

Rocheport's novel offers an inside-view of living conditions in these urban housing projects through the perspective of her young narrator. Joysane's opening statement, the now familiar "Je suis née des Allocations et d'un jour férié." (7) refers to France's family welfare system<sup>3</sup> which was instituted to encourage families to have more children by offering parents a financial reward for the birth of each child. The aim of this incentive program was to reverse a population deficit experienced by the country in the aftermath of two devastating wars. Rocheport's novel points up, however, through the narrating voice of Josyane and through numerous conversations among members of her family and other residents of the projects, that, although the policy did indeed increase the number of French citizens, its effect on their lives was in many ways adverse.

The intertextual voices present in *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* are less remarkable than in most of Rocheport's other novels. The most notable are again from the Bible (Josyane's catechism classes) and from various literary sources. *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* alludes, of course, to "les enfants du siècle," the self-image of the young Romantic hero, born too late to participate in the Revolution and Napoleon's wars, born to dryness and passivity. The term was made famous by Musset in "Confession d'un enfant du siècle." On the title page, the voice of

Rimbaud is summoned to forewarn readers that for the children of this novel (and, as the title implies, of this century), "la vraie vie est absente." Another first novel by a female writer will take up a similar theme six years later giving voice to the struggle of France's immigrant workers in the city's automobile factories. In 1967, Claire Etcherelli's *Elise ou la vraie vie* also won the *Prix du roman populiste*. Thus, an effective dialogue between these two novels is set up. Both deal with the plight of the working class, one at home, the other at work.

Other literary allusions range from the mention of popular newspapers and magazines and the comic strip character Tintin to the parodying of scenes from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.<sup>4</sup> In one part of Josyane's monologue, Rochefort humorously drops the names of some of France's literary heavy-weights as street names to emphasize the complexity for the narrator in attempting to find her way among the maze of streets within the Sarcelles development:

j'étais dans la rue Paul-Valéry, j'avais pris la rue Mallarmé, j'avais tourné dans Victor-Hugo, enfilé Paul-Claudel, et je me retombais dans Valéry et j'arrivais pas à en sortir. (95)

Many readers have experienced difficulty getting through some of the texts of these intellectuals. Apparently the streets of Sarcelles can be just as daunting.

The voices of the various characters set up several sites of tension in this short novel as opposing ideologies come into conflict. Double standards between the sexes prompts Josyane to protest that: "Patrick, lui il a le droit de traîner tant qu'il veut!"(35) and to resentfully note that, "elle eut un garçon. Elle ne faisait que des garçons, et elle en était fière."(66) Sibling rivalry is another source of tension, as Josyane again reveals: "je leur donnais à manger rien que des trucs qu'ils n'aimaient

pas, on se distrait comme on peut.”(67) Socialist ideology is pitted against capitalist materialism and selfish unconcern for others. In the following quote, the narrator suggests that the school system under capitalist management works contrary to the interests of students.

Elle me dit que dans un pays socialiste on m'aurait fait poursuivre mes études, même si ma famille était encore plus pauvre; dans un pays socialiste, chacun faisait ce pour quoi il était fait. . . (99)

Romantic fantasy and blunt actuality clash as exuberant youths and apathetic adults understand differently what it means to live. For Josyane, the older generation seems hopelessly paralyzed and incapable of enjoying life. She fears that becoming adult will mean falling into what she perceives as a dead end existence. As she begins at last to grasp the overwhelming odds against her being able to break economic, social and political restraints, she concedes: “je devenais morte, c’est ça devenir une grand personne cette fois j’y étais je commençais à piger, arriver dans un cul-de-sac et se prendre en gelée.”(107)

Rocheport’s narrative often works to take language apart in order to show how it shapes consciousness and limits perception. Especially targeted is the language of platitudes and ready-made clichés. One particularly derisive scene takes place during a family holiday at a country inn when several low-income families gather for an afternoon of leisurely conversation. The men engage in a kind of verbal combat on the subject of cars. The child-narrator, Josyane, notes that her father’s personality is transformed when he associates himself with his car: “mais question voiture c’était un autre homme: plein d’allant, de dynamisme, d’autorité.”(42) (This fascination with cars and other modern consumer goods in post-war France, as

documented in novels by Rochefort and others, became the subject of Kristin Ross's important sociological publication in 1995, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*).<sup>5</sup> Their speech is replete with pat phrases taken directly from the language of advertising: "une voiture qui tient la route . . . vous la sentez qui colle à la Chaussée" (49) and "vingt ans d'avance sur l'Industrie automobile mondiale." (52) The language and spirit of market competition invades the men's conversation to the point that their discourse becomes contentious rather than communicative.

--La 2 CV c'est du vrai carton, y a qu'à y mettre le doigt pour faire un trou, dit Charnier.

--Tiens, vous essayez pour voir. On verra qui c'est qui fera le trou le premier.

--La Traction, c'est du solide, dit papa. Un tank.

--Ça ne braque pas, jeta Charnier.

--Bien sûr faut pas une fillette pour la manier, dit papa. C'est une vraie machine, pas un jouet. Une voiture d'homme. Et ça arrache. Même en côte. (52)

The women's conversation centers on their self-sacrifice for the sake of their children and husbands, adopting a language echoing that common in popular romance magazines of the day: "on les met au monde et puis . . .;" "c'est notre vie, à nous les femmes;" "et pourquoi tant de souffrances, on se le demande." (54) Finally, both groups, for lack of anything more interesting or important to discuss resort to repeating familiar phrases first about the weather and then about their inevitable return home. The narrating voice of Josyanne picks up their litany of clichés and mockingly mimicks: "dommage que ce soit fini on commençait vraiment à s'y mettre, hélas! Les meilleures choses n'ont qu'un temps. D'ailleurs dans le fond on aime bien retrouver son petit chez soi. On est content de partir mais on est content aussi de revenir." (58)

In the last pages of the novel, Josyane's voice abandons its mocking tone. She is pulled into the very mindset against which she has railed from the beginning. In effect, Josyane has lost her voice. Pregnant with Philippe's child, she gives up her rebellious sarcasm and begins to parrot Philippe by relating his fantasy of their future life together, a virtual list of material "happiness." There is mention of *la prime, un prêt, le Crédit*, echoes of her parents' existence which she has just sarcastically ridiculed for the last one hundred and twenty pages, an existence marked by large numbers of children and economic dependency. As a final irony, in the last sentence she suggests to her fiancé that they live in this new community: "je lui indiquai Sarcelles." (122)

Rocheport has been criticized for what seemed to some the easy, "happy ending" of this novel. But, in an interview with Ailsa Steckel, Rocheport argued,

Je me méfie des "happy endings". Dans *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, c'est une tragédie à la fin, c'est copié des magazines de femme, une parodie de ça-grinçante. Elle se sent piégée. (149)

In her autobiographical text, she comments that, "on m'a reproché d'avoir fait une fin optimiste. Ha ha ha. C'est un roman d'épouvante si vous voulez savoir. Je hurlais: CES MAISONS, VOUS VERREZ: ÇA TUE." (*Ma Vie*, 260) Sarcelles, then, serves as a fitting metaphor for the paradox of modernity with its potential for human progress as well as deterioration.

Although Rocheport's third novel, *Les Stances à Sophie*, also proceeds primarily through the voice of an autodiegetic, female narrator, the reader again must be alert to the shifts, layers, and multiple perspectives of that voice. As is the case with the female protagonist in Rocheport's first two novels, a noticable schizophrenia

exists within the narrating voice. The plurality that characterizes Céline's voice, however, is not only more complex than that operating in the previous novels, it forms the basis for the novel's structure and theme as well. Speaking of Céline, Rochefort remarked, "j'ai eu une idée de la schizophrénie. . . . C'est-à-dire, toutes les femmes, particulièrement les femmes sont schizophrènes. Divisées, déchirées, quoi. . . . moi, je vois vraiment ça comme une chose sociale. . . ." (Steckel, 174-175)

Early in the narrative Céline manifests the first signs of a split perspective when her interior monologue abruptly changes course. After two and a half pages of ruminating over past events, and including thoughts she addresses particularly to Philippe, Céline's disembodied voice directs its attention to her unwilling flesh.

Allons, debout. Lève-toi. Tu entends carcasse. Mais elle ne veut pas. Elle souffre la pauvre. Elle a mal. Gnagnagna. Ça y est voilà qu'elle pleure. Encore un instant elle dira papa maman. C'est fait elle parle; elle dit: Philippe, s'il te plaît. . . .

Fatigant. La moitié de moi pour le moins voudrait être à cent lieues. . . . Mais l'autre moitié ne veut pas démarrer d'ici. Pour rien au monde. Ma moitié numéro deux tuerait plutôt ma moitié numéro un; c'est du reste ce qu'elle fait. Elle répète Philippe s'il te plaît, il paraît que c'est tout ce qu'elle sait dire. (59)

The dilemma of Céline's dual existence is humorously parodied in the following chapter as she relates a shopping experience with the clerk in the decorating department of a store in town. Lined drapes, in French "doubles rideaux," serve as a metaphor for her double self, the one that everyone sees and the one underneath. Further, the equivocal rhetoric of the clerk, curiously reminiscent of Philippe's bourgeois logic regarding her personal comportment, only increases her frustration.

"Mais Madame nous en vendons beaucoup", voilà l'argument-clé. Eh, qu'est-ce que j'en ai à foutre de ce que les autres aiment? . . .



"Mais Madame, c'est ce qui se fait." C'est ce que les fabricants font, ça oui, je le vois bien, mais ce que le client veut, on s'en occupe, ou non? . . . C'est de la dictature. (64)

The rhetoric continues and soon becomes a question of semantics that only exasperates Céline further. In a richly ironic passage of layered voices in free indirect discourse, the narrator alternately addresses the implied reader and assumes the voices of various clerks, mimicking phrases she hears repeatedly such as: "mais ça Madame ce n'est pas du double rideau c'est de la doublure;" (65) "cela ne se fait pas Madame;" (66) "parce que c'est comme ça que ça se fait Madame;" (66) "on ne nous le demande pas Madame;" (66) and "on ne les fait plus Madame." (67) For draperies, bedding, cookware, everywhere she goes to shop, a similar scene ensues. Céline's narrative, seems intended to fix a complicity with her implied readers by addressing them directly: "je ne sais pas si vous l'avez remarqué, et si vous vous reportez à France-Femme vous verrez que ça fait rage à chaque page et si vous ne vous y mettez pas vous aurez l'air d'une noix. C'est un ordre." (67) The narrator's use of the formal pronoun would suggest that the narratee she envisions would be a young, bourgeois housewife who has likely had a similar experience, who would understand and share her feelings. The specific mention of *France-Femme* functions as an ironic criticism of convention, the cookie-cutter pattern of existence effected by the advertising and articles in the magazine.

The voice of Céline, similar to that of Geneviève in *Le Repos du guerrier*, remains locked in the relative silence of her interior monologue during the early part of the narrative. For the first one hundred fifteen pages, Céline does little more than indirectly report Philippe's words and silently react to them. The opening pages are a

veritable litany of "disait Philippe." As Céline notes, "il est fort Philippe, il est solide, il est sûr. Il sait. Il est là. Et moi je l'écoutais, bouche bée. . . ." (12) She is literally seduced by his voice and his rhetoric. "Il a une si belle voix," she sighs. (13) Repeatedly, she refers to "ces belles paroles," "sa bouche," and "cette voix-là." For his part, Philippe is generally critical of any response that she ventures to proffer, finally evoking her sentiment that, "j'ai fait une faute. Je me suis exprimée. Je n'aurais pas dû. Pourquoi ne puis-je tenir ma langue? Ce qu'il faut . . . c'est non seulement des boules quiès dans les oreilles mais du sparadrap sur la bouche." (18)

The narrator's silence, or inability to assert her voice, is a result of what Michel Foucault has referred to as the principle of exclusion or prohibition that exists in societies. He explains that,

in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality.

In a society such as our own we all know the rules of *exclusion*. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is *prohibited*. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. ("The Discourse on Language", 216)

Foucault has outlined "three great systems of exclusion governing discourse – prohibited words, the division of madness and the will to truth. . . ." (219) Céline falls prey to all three. Her choice of words is frequently too coarse for Philippe, resulting in an impression or image of her that he finds incongruous with the mythical feminine ideal he desires. He chastizes her: "eh bien il faudra que ça te passe. Car moi je ne supporterai plus tes manières grossières." (85) She learns to suppress that

part of her self in his presence. She confesses that, "quand on est avec son mari, on ne dit pas les mêmes choses, on ne fait pas les mêmes choses." (103)

Categorizing Céline as crazy, Philippe justifies his dismissal of her voice as insignificant whenever it dares to contest his own. He retorts, "voyons, tiens-toi un peu, on va penser que je suis avec une folle. Tu dis des bêtises." (26) Céline herself relates that she has, in fact, recently seen a psychologist: "une femme qui vient de faire une dépression nerveuse et de coûter deux cents mille balles de clinique se manie avec précautions." (31) Soon, at Philippe's insistence, Céline takes medication to "control" her behavior and help her conform to more "appropriate" models.

Céline's voice originates in the margins, or even outside, of the sectors that produce and impose the accepted discourses, outside of what she mockingly refers to as "le machin." (7) She is female, atheist, uneducated, unemployed, and rather bohemian. She opens by noting that,

on trouve le machin déjà tout constitué, en apparence solide comme du roc, il paraît que ç'a toujours été comme ça, que ça continuera jusqu'à la fin des temps, et il n'y a pas de raison que ça change. C'est la nature des choses. C'est ce qu'ils disent tous, et d'abord, on le croit.  
... (7)

Céline's voice is constantly held in check by Philippe and members of his bourgeois family whose attitudes and values represent the "machin" or the controlling discourses of her day. Her desire for love and acceptance, combined with confused bewilderment when confronted with these discourses, cause her to retreat into passive silence or to numbly acquiesce. As she remarks, "nous éprouvons des faiblesses qui nous brouillent l'esprit et nous jettent dans les contradictions, quand ce n'est pas dans l'imbécillité. . . . pour réaliser que c'est simplement, bête, ça demande

du temps, et une bonne tête. En attendant, il faut se le faire.”(8) Precisely, Céline’s narrative will bring the reader along with her through this process of gradual awareness and, finally, of self-actualization.

By page 115 of the novel, Céline has been seduced, at least outwardly, by the power of Philippe’s (and what Rochefort would refer to as bourgeois and materialist) rhetoric. She relates: “eh maintenant, je ne conteste plus. Je fais. . . Tout ce qu’il veut, il l’obtient. Tout ce qu’il attend . . . il l’a.”(115-116) and “je ne dis plus merde en public.”(119) But, it is in this section of the novel that Céline experiences a profound schizophrenia as she increasingly becomes aware of the discrepancies between what is said and what is meant, between what people say and what they do, between the way things are and the way they seem. She notes, “j’écoute, j’écoute, comment pourrais-je dire? Avec ma troisième oreille. . . Pas ce qu’ils disent (qui n’a jamais aucun, aucun, aucun intérêt) mais comme ils disent. Le rythme. Le son. C’est curieux. Beaucoup plus intéressant.”(119) (This theme of the *non-dit*, or communicative silence, will be developed more fully in Rochefort’s later writing.) She experiences a sort of identity crisis as the loss of her familiar self becomes more and more acute: “sans doute n’ai-je plus d’inconscient. J’appelle: pas d’écho. . . Les miroirs me renvoient mon ombre au passage dans les corridors: qui est-ce? Je n’aime pas cette dame là-bas qui passe, dont le visage lisse et pâle reflète une absence. Je l’évite.”(123) She is on medication: “j’ai des pilules à prendre, calmantes; et des remontantes.”(126) designed to make her feel that she has a “normal” life. Her new personality: “la fidèle Madame Aignan, c’est moi.”(128)

Not long afterward, Céline has a lesbian experience with Julia, the wife of one of her husband's friends. It is important to note, however, that Rochefort does not include details of this episode in the novel. Those details would only detract from the narrative intention, which is political and ideological rather than sexual. She sparsely devotes only a few lines:

avec Julia, je revis un peu. Un jour, j'ai même ressuscité. Il faisait chaud on venait de prendre une douche, tranquilles chez elle personne. On a eu envie de se faire plaisir. On l'a fait. Comme ça, simplement. Juste pour le plaisir. (132)

The physical dimension of this sexual encounter is effectively cut out of the text. This ellipsis or omission represents a stance on the part of the author to eliminate any elements from her novel that could be construed as pornographic or voyeuristic and thereby appeal to a reader looking for cheap thrills.<sup>6</sup> In an interview, Rochefort stated that, "because we don't want men to look at what we do, I cut the intimate scenes between Julia and Céline." (Arsène, 108) Perhaps it is her way of indicating indirectly that lesbian love is always in the margins or suppressed. Or perhaps, as Margaret-Anne Hutton suggests, "the almost passing reference to the sexual nature of the relationship might also be seen as a means of avoiding making an issue of something which the author wishes to represent as normal, a point on a continuum of sexual relations." (*The Novels of Christiane Rochefort*, 74)

Stylistically, ellipsis, or what Rochefort refers to as "coups," are an important narrative device that add interest to the novel by seductively drawing the reader beyond the confines of the written narrative and into adventures of his own imagination in a kind of game. She admits, "là, c'était conscient, ce truc, je crois, à

part que j'adore jouer, ce jeu-là. . . "(Steckel, 177) It's the same game of seduction that Barthes describes in, *Le Plaisir du texte*:

le plaisir de la lecture vient évidemment de certaines ruptures. . . (14) il produit en moi le meilleur plaisir s'il parvient à se faire écouter indirectement; si, le lisant, je suis entraîné à souvent lever la tête, à entendre quelque chose.(41)

As a consequence of this relationship, Céline is reawakened to a consciousness of her former self: "je me suis regardée dans la glace. Je me suis reconnue immédiatement. C'est moi, celle-là. Moi! Moi!"(132) More importantly, she begins, again, to find and assert her own voice: "je chante. Depuis quand je n'ai pas chanté. Philippe me regarde, surpris: Il ne m'a jamais entendue, il paraît que j'ai une voix."(134) In fact, for the first time, Céline's voice engages in a lively conversation with Philippe, in an effort to persuade him to let her drive his new car. She prevails.

*Les Stances à Sophie* is also stylistically characterized by what Rochefort has referred to as inserted dialogues. The conversation between Céline and Philippe over who will drive is one example of many such mini-dialogues that punctuate the narrative throughout the novel. Rochefort has commented that, "Il y a des sous-trucs là-dedans qui sont les dialogues insérés, que j'aime beaucoup faire, parce que c'est une photographie en écriture, tu vois, tu dois avoir un truc. . ."(Steckel, 178) As a narrative device, the insertion of these dialogues is an effective tool in the creation of ironic humor and a sense of immediacy and mimetic realism. As Rochefort suggests, they provide a break in the narrative and dramatically represent the tension resulting from opposing ideologies and perspectives. The reader witnesses first-hand scenes between characters, scenes illustrating the conflicts that thematically characterize the

novel. Equally important, these numerous dialogic exchanges provide a medium through which Rochefort can linguistically differentiate the voices of the novels's characters.

One cleverly worked dialogic encounter illustrates the total lack of communication between men and women as each speaks "through" the conversation of the other, seemingly oblivious to any comments other than those interesting to and directed to him/herself. As two couples discuss plans for a mutual vacation, Rochefort begins with the use of tags (*disent les femmes, disent les hommes*) to guide the reader's interpretation. The tags are soon abandoned, however, and the reader must sort through the voices on his own to identify their origins by contextual clues.

- Tu verras que j'arriverai avant toi, dit Philippe.
- On veut un endroit avec des rochers, disent les femmes.
- Ah ah! Dit Jean-Pierre. 220! Avec la tienne tu les fais jamais c'est un veau.
- On pêchera des crabes.
- Un veau mon cul dit Philippe recourant dans sa fureur à l'argot du Seizième, et de toute façon en rallye il n'y a pas que la vitesse il y a aussi l'adresse.
- On prend les maillots? L'eau est surement encore bonne.
- Alors je crains pas grand-chose. Et avec son démarrage instantané, ses reprises, ses
- De toute façon on se fera arroser par les vagues même si on ne se baigne pas. (167)

And so on. For the men, the affair becomes a personal contest, a race: *tu* versus *je*. For the women, it is a question of shared activities; the pronoun is always *on*. For the reader the dialogue ominously foreshadows a tragic accident that will occur as a result of this contest between *belles bagnoles*.

In another scene, Philippe and Céline discuss the practice among Catholics of going to confession to gain absolution from the priest just prior to the event of their

marriage. Céline resists what she sees as unnecessary and meaningless tradition.

"Qu'est-ce que je vais bien pouvoir lui raconter à ce type?"(37), she asks. When Philippe does not respond adequately, she retorts: "bon, je lui dirais que j'ai maraudé des pommes. . . . Je vais lui lire Joyce. . . . Ça m'embête d'aller là. Pourquoi tout ce cirque?"(37) As the dialogue continues, Philippe becomes increasingly intolerant of her defiance.

--Tu sais bien que c'est pour mes parents. Nous avons déjà réglé cette question en son temps, je ne vois pas pourquoi tu la reposes maintenant.

--Parce que je suis devant. Mais ils sont vraiment religieux tes parents?

--Un mariage civil les embarrasserait. Or je ne vois aucune raison de les embarrasser.

--C'est effrayant.

--Quoi effrayant?

--Alors si tu as des enfants ils se marieront à l'église pour ne pas t'embarrasser? Et comme ça le truc continue jusqu'à la fin des temps, Dieu personne sait plus qui c'est mais le truc continue. Et tu ne trouves pas ça effrayant.

...

--Mais la question n'est pas là! Il s'agit d'un bulletin de confession, qu'il faut avoir. C'est tout simple. Ce n'est pas de la métaphysique. Tu ne changeras donc jamais? Entre, on ne va pas rester sur ces marches jusqu'à ce que tu aies la révélation. Nous avons encore beaucoup à faire aujourd'hui. (37)

Here the tension between Philippe's bourgeois conservatism and Céline's defiant nonconformity is dramatically illustrated. Céline's language is punctuated with vernacular such as *type*, *cirque*, *truc*, questions, and careless syntactical constructions. Philippe, on the other hand, speaks authoritatively and condescendingly, always carefully conscious of his "correct" grammar and somewhat pompous choice of words intended to summarily dismiss Céline's



rebellious protestations. The "logic" of his statements relies on strict adherence to convention, in language, attitude, and behavior.

Céline's speech as a character is marked throughout the text by oral syntactical constructions, fragmentation, repetition, slang, litote, and ellipsis. Although these same traits also generally characterize Céline's narration, a second personality or voice is interspersed with that of the character, one that seeks complicity with the reader through metadiegetic distancing. This second narrating voice finds its locus in neologisms, parenthetical remarks, and rhetorical questions that become more frequent as Céline the character becomes increasingly aware of the semantic barrier separating her from Philippe. While the primary narrating voice functions as purveyor of the diegesis, this second narrator, represented as the voice of *Troisième Oeil*, distances himself in order to look critically at the characters, their actions, and their words: "il connaît parfaitement son intérêt, le mien, qui est d'écarter de nous toute peine et en particulier la pire qui puisse être faite à l'âme, savoir la Connerie." (89) He is particularly attentive to the vagaries of language. When Philippe insists, for example, "mais moi je te parle réellement!" this narrator silently reacts: "réellement. Troisième Oeil note le terme avec un grincement sarcastique." (90) Noticing that often people talk authoritatively beginning their statements with "moi je," this narrator observes, "ce qu'il y a de remarquable c'est qu'une fois placé le Moi Je ils répètent mot pour mot ce qu'ils ont piqué à l'extérieur, contenu, syntaxe et vocabulaire." (120)

It is also this second narrating voice that speaks in parenthetical, interpretive asides: ("il ne comprend pas") (150), ("ravie elle aussi de me voir lancée dans les

travaux féminins") (151), and in rhetorical questions scattered throughout the narration: "et au nom de quoi, la repousser? La Liberté. La liberté de quoi?"(19); "Qu'est-ce que je peux faire d'autre? Vraiment. Qu'est-ce que je pouvais faire d'autre?"(21); "Quoi c'est un choc de se marier non?"(55)

This second narrator finds further expression in occasional notations that read like stage directions in a play, speaking from yet another position of distance. In a particularly humorous passage, Rochefort creates a scene during which Philippe speaks patronizingly to Céline while he indulges his appetite with a large serving of raw oysters. His words, like the oysters he is eating, slide easily in and out of his mouth. Like the oysters, served with little preparation and slimy in texture, his words are thoughtless and difficult for her to grasp with any real meaning. As he sits consuming the oysters, his repeated swallowing punctuates his rhetoric and, in a sense, metaphorically illustrates the intended effect of his condescending discourse: Céline should simply, and unquestioningly, swallow his words whole. (my italics)

J'essaye seulement de mettre un peu d'ordre dans cette petite tête. *Il caresse ladite*. C'est plein de fausses idées, qui te font du mal. Qui cachent les vraies choses qui y sont. Et moi. . .

*Sa main enférme la mienne*. Voilà les huîtres, *il la retire, pour attraper son plat*.

— . . . et moi, vois-tu, *il avale une huître*, je ne veux pas que tu te fasses du mal; *il avale une huître*. Inutilement. *Il avale*. J'ai envie que tu sois heureuse. *Il avale*. Même malgré toi. *Il avale une huître*. Et toi, tu pleures! Allez, mange, elles sont délicieuses. *Il avale*. Tu te débats comme si je voulais t'administrer du poison. Je suis du poison? *Il avale une huître*. *Il soupire*. La vérité c'est que tu ne m'aimes pas.

— Oh Philippe! . . .

*Il avale deux huîtres*.

— Alors? Alors pourquoi refuses-tu de t'abandonner à tes sentiments? Pour des principes? Lesquels? Tu ne le sais même pas! Pourquoi essayes-tu d'étouffer ce qu'il y a de meilleur en toi? Je le sais, moi, ce qu'il y a de meilleur en toi. *Il avale une huître*.

— Ah? Qu'est-ce que c'est?

—Tu es une femme. (22)

"J'ai horreur des mots qui n'ont pas de sens," rails Céline. (68) She begins to analyse the way people use words. Philippe's statement that, "tu ne vas tout de même pas faire une telle histoire parce qu'on n'a pas trouvé ta peinture géniale!" (186), prompts the following deconstruction by the narrator.

Analyse: "une telle histoire" – un, je suis simplement allée me promener; deux, c'est toi qui me fais l'histoire en question moi je ne l'ai pas encore ouvert. "On": qui on? Tout le monde selon la tournure de ta phrase. . . . "Géniale": mot exagéré jusqu'au mensonge, destiné à donner l'impression que j'ai nourri l'illusion que ma peinture pouvait l'être. . . . Enfin, l'ensemble même de la phrase... l'ensemble tend à faire accroire que j'aurais moi-même recherché des louanges et que je serais vexée de ne les avoir point recueillies. (186-187)

The continuing necessity of deconstructive analysis of people's speech, particularly Philippe's, prompts Céline to create what she first calls a "Dictionnaire Céline-Philippien" and finally a "Dictionnaire Sémantique Néo-Bourgeois." (212-213) As she exclaims, "il manque le dictionnaire qui nous permettrait de nous parler, toi et moi. Mais je crains qu'il n'existe pas dans le commerce. Je vais le faire. Demain, je m'y mets." (199) Sample entries she suggests for this dictionary include the following.

Hypersensible: susceptible de ressentir des impressions. Contraire d'hypersensible: Normal. – Ne rien sentir du tout. Exemple: acheter une radio deux cent vingt mille balles, l'ouvrir pendant qu'on mange et ne pas entendre ce qui en sort. (215)

Amour. – A: pour une femme; consécration totale à la vie domestique, avec service de nuit. B: pour un homme; être content comme ça. (216)

Finally, at one point Céline confronts Philippe directly and accuses him of using reductive language to stereotype and silence her. She forces him to stop and listen to the words he uses without thinking, pointing out the obvious bias they express.

- Tu es complètement tordue ma pauvre fille, tiens.
- Exemple de coulage: tu es complètement tordue...
- ..ce n'est pas mes malheureux mots qui pourraient "te couler"... tu n'es pas solide.
- Top! Deuxième exemple. Semer le doute.
- Evidemment si tu t'arrêtes à tous les mots! Ça devient de la paranoïa.
- Top!
- Mais, tu es folle!
- Top!
- Oh, ça va. (218)

This time it is Philippe that is silenced. In the battle of words, this time, Céline wins.

Intertextual voices are integral to the narrative tension in *Les Stances à Sophie*. As in *Le Repos du guerrier*, these borrowed voices include a variety of types, including allusions to figures as diverse as Attila, Freud, Littré, Modigliani, and Courbet and musical references ranging from Brassens and Cool to Vivaldi and Beethoven. Most significant among the musical intertexts is the novel's title. The title derives from a bawdy song about a prostitute, a woman whom the lyrics depict as a scorned and discarded sex object. By the end of the novel, Céline has decided to leave Philippe because she has finally realized that her relationship with him had been built on illusion and myth. She rejects her subservient role of wife/sex object, writing in a "Dear John" letter: "je crains mon cher Philippe que tu ne te sois un peu pris pour un Autre. Abandonnée dans tes mains je n'ai fait que descendre." (241) She acknowledges, however, that she has learned something from her experience about how society works: "je pars sans regrets: ce n'était pas du temps perdu; grâce à toi,

par les hasards de l'amour, j'ai pu approcher la Machine. . . . Il importe de la connaître, d'observer comment elle opère, afin de pouvoir s'en défendre, et se garder en vie."(241,2) Céline scornfully rejects the woman she had once tried to become, the dutiful bourgeois wife and object of Philippe's affection. She anticipates, however, that Philippe will only interpret her departure as sexual and view her as lacking in morals. Reciting the verse from Sophie's song, she imagines Philippe's voice:

Il n'aura qu'un cri Philippe: La Putain! Ah si j'avais su!  
 --Qu'elle n'était qu'une grue!  
 --J' l'aurais fait passer par l'trou des goguenots!

*"Ah, toi, que j'aimais tant  
 J't'emmerde, j't'emmerde,  
 Ah, toi, que j'aimais tant,  
 J't'emmerde à présent!"*

Là-dessus je crois que je peux fermer ce piano, ce sera son chant  
 d'adieu.(243)<sup>7</sup>

The "j't'emmerde" can be understood to represent the voice of both Céline and Philippe, though each rejects the "putain" for different reasons. The schizophrenic tension that Céline has experienced throughout the novel is finally resolved as she closes the door on that part of her life:

Je la referme derrière moi. Je m'adosse contre. Je suis là. Je regarde.  
 Je respire.  
 Enfin. Seule. (245)

Rocheport pointedly inserts Biblical intertext in *Les Stances à Sophie*, as she did in *Le Repos du guerrier*, to strengthen the voice of her narrator and to draw parallels with the characters and situations of the diegesis. As she gives in to Philippe's way of life, the narrator recalls verses from the Bible mumbling to herself

that, "il faut accepter d'un coeur joyeux, pour la gloire de Dieu. Amen." (115) To her implied reader she challenges, "que celles qui ne sont pas tombées me jettent la première pierre." (115) In her effort to please Philippe, Céline recalls the Biblical question, "qui peut trouver une femme vertueuse?" (119) She works on a tapestry that has as its theme Adam and Eve, the Tree, the Serpent and the Apple. She weeps empathetically at hearing on the radio Bach's rendition of the Passion of Christ according to Saint John (214) and is moved later to purchase a tape of the music. (236)

Most frequently, Rochefort incorporates literary intertexts. These intertextual voices cover a wide range of diverse literary personnae, each bringing specific intention to the dialogic interaction already underway. Many of them are names that evoke notions of romantic love and nostalgia, games of seduction and illusion, or narratives of personal confession and reflection, all of which parallel experiences of the narrator herself. Among these intertextual references are: Hervé Benoît, (pseudonyme under which Rochefort wrote collaborative detective stories), Casanova, Rousseau, Bovary, Villon ("Les Neiges d'antan"), Dostoïevsky, Plato, Romeo and Juliette, Saint Augustin, Lolita, Phèdre, Pécuchet, the mythical *Licorne*, and, again, Valéry's "Madame la Marquise."<sup>8</sup> A recurring literary intertext is that of *La Princesse de Clèves* that Julia reads aloud to Céline as Céline attempts to paint her portrait. Mention of this seventeenth-century heroine suggests several correspondences with the character and situation of twentieth-century Céline and explains the novel's appeal to these two women. Like the *Princesse de Clèves*, Céline marries into a world of privilege. Like the *Princesse*, she dutifully conforms

to the expectations of her husband and of convention, but feels stressed and repulsed by the superficial, material glamor of society life. The Princesse's shocking refusal of marriage and decision to retire from the world, after the death of her husband, function as prolepsis to Céline's decision at the end of the novel to leave Philippe and live for herself, alone: "enfin, seule," she sighs.(245) Both women, in the end, go against convention, rejecting what others might covet, a life of ease and comfort as the wife of a man of financial means and social position. Both are characterized by their willed opposition. Madame de Clèves was torn by love yet didn't leave her husband. Rochefort's heroine leaves her husband for very good reasons that he wouldn't understand (that is one of the reasons), and that specifically do not include desire or affection for another man.

The autobiographical aspect of *Les Stances à Sophie* is notable, not only from specific comments made by Rochefort to that effect, but by evidence present in the voices of the text. To Monique Crochet's question, "Est-ce que le livre *Les Stances à Sophie* est jusqu'à une certaine mesure autobiographique?", Rochefort responded, "oui, c'est le seul. J'ai été mariée quatre ans et c'était vraiment une erreur du même type que celle de Céline." (*Entretien*, 432) To Alice Jardine she admitted, "what happens in this book most directly resembles my own personal experience: I actually had that kind of marriage. . . . It's part of my life experience as a woman," (*Shifting Scenes*, 175) Rochefort has stated, however, that she considers this novel her worst work precisely because of its autobiographical content. "I have a concept of what good writing is that has to do with the concept of distance, the concept of internal structure," she has insisted.(181) She has expressed a distaste for what she

calls "literature of experience" through which people simply "expectorate their miseries." (181) Looking back at that novel in 1983, Rochefort commented that she no longer identified with Céline and was focusing more on the younger generation. (*Women Writers Talking*, 219)

Rochefort chose Céline, whose rebellious attitudes and mocking criticisms echo the author's own, as her mouthpiece. Rochefort's condemnation of the institution of marriage as well as the capitalist materialism in which it functions has been well documented. On the subject of marriage, she declared, "I stopped writing when I was married." (Hirsh, 109) On capitalist society she offers this:

the Western way of thinking may be considered a brain-washing. My own mental structures have been greatly perverted by the dominating discourse. . . . I myself was able to put all this mess into political terms. That is, if as women we are not biologically inferior, then we belong to an oppressed class. What is called culture should no longer be seen as *the* culture, but as one of many possible ones. In the present case, it is only the culture of the Western white male, a limited one, and very, very, intolerant. It leaves us very few options. You can try to be like the oppressor or like the image the oppressor has of you, or finally, you can try to be something else, to find yourself. (111)

In *Les Stances à Sophie* Rochefort represents, through the narrative experience of Céline, a woman working her way through this situation.



## NOTES

1. In *Enfance*, Sarraute divides the narrative voice into three aspects of the author/protagonist. This multiplicity of voices attests to the author's belief in the complexity and plurality of an individual's identity. First, there is the voice of the child of the past who is evoked. Then one also hears two distinct voices of the adult: the present one that is remembering and the one who interprets the scenes, the events and the people who traverse her memory. Sarraute chose to represent the analytic, authoritative voice as a masculine personality and the nostalgic voice of memory and imagination as feminine, further distinguishing the two different aspects. (see also Philippe Lejeune's essay, "Paroles d'Enfance" in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*. 93 (1990:23-38). Verena Andermatt Conley in "Duras and the Scene of Writing" (*Remains to be Seen: Essays on Marguerite Duras*. Sanford S. Ames, ed. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. NY, 1988) writes that in *l'Amant*, "Duras as author, actor, divides herself into *je* and *elle* without a proper name. She alludes to a triangular relationship which breaks out of the narcissistic mother-child dyad less perhaps in an effort to accede to a symbolic than to open to an endless series of substitutions" (185). Janine Ricouart (*Écriture Féminine et violence: une étude de Marguerite Duras*. Summa Publications, Inc. Birmingham, 1991) comments, "dans 'l'autobiographie' de Marguerite Duras, *L'Amant* (1984), le problème de l'énonciation se traduit dans l'alternance d'une première personne et d'une troisième personne. . . . L'emploi systématique d'une première personne ou d'une troisième personne dans la narration n'est pas originale en soi. . . . Mais elle alterne ce *je* avec *elle*, tout en référant à la même 'personne', somme si une narratrice omnisciente ne pouvait pas être l'objet de son propre discours, comme si elle ne pouvait renoncer à son habitude de dire *elle* en racontant son histoire, comme s'il lui fallait garder une certaine distance par rapport à son texte autobiographique." (125,6)

2. Rochefort makes reference in her autobiographical *Ma Vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur* to her admiration for classical music, particularly for Bach (32) and for German, English, and Spanish vocal music (46-48).

3. In Thody's introduction, he notes that between 1914 and 1918 1.4 million French men were killed in the war. He relates that, "It is estimated that the first world war reduced the French population by 3,170,600: 1.4 million soldiers killed, 1,770,600 babies not born because the men who should have fathered them were away from home at the front or dead" (ix). He continues by noting that the French government felt compelled to take measures to reverse the trend of declining French population by instituting incentive measures specifically aimed at encouraging population growth. He further notes that, "In 1920, the French government had banned the sale and advertisement of contraceptives. This law remained in force until 1967, and abortion was not legalised until 1975. However, repressive measures were clearly not enough. People had to be encouraged to have babies, and a first step was taken in the *Code de la famille* in July 1939. Then, in 1945 and 1946, a much more generous system of family allowances was introduced, and it is these which are evoked in the

first sentence of *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*" (ix). (Some of these include the *allocation de salaire unique* and the *allocation de logement*.)

4. Margaret-Anne Hutton establishes a parallel between Emma and Josyane reminding readers of the misplaced love affair between Emma and Rodolphe and scenes in *Madame Bovary* that are similar to the ones between Josyane and Guido. During one scene the couple utters sentimentalities and ends by each simply repeating the name of the other over and over. Both young women spend hours sitting by the window gazing out and wistfully awaiting any event that might break the monotony and boredom of their lives. In both books, the narrative experiences an accelerated passage of time. Both women are influenced by their reading of romantic novels and magazine stories.

5. In her introduction, Ross states that, "French people, peasants and intellectuals alike, tended to describe the changes in their lives in terms of the abrupt transformations in home and transport: the coming of objects – large-scale consumer durables, cars and refrigerators – into their street and homes, into their workplaces and their *emplois du temps*" (5). In numerous instances, Ross refers to Rochefort's texts *Les Petits Enfants du siècle* and *Les Stances à Sophie* (along with novels by Beauvoir, Perec, Etcherelli, Sagan, Triolet, and others) as literary documents that support her findings and theories. For Ross, "Rochefort is one of the most unequivocal voices of the period at work debunking the way in which the state-led modernization drive is ideologized. . . . Read today, her work can almost be taken as a textbook illustration of sociologist Luc Boltanski's theory that...ideology can be traced in the various imposed comportments such as driving, the links created between individuals and society by the merchandise created by that society." (61)

6. With regard to her reader, Rochefort once commented in an interview with G. Griffin that, "je supprime tout ce qui pourrait lui plaire, tout prétexte qu'il  
6. In a 1975 interview with Ailsa Steckel, printed as part of Steckel's doctoral theses "Narration and Metaphor as Ideology in the Novels of Christiane Rochefort", Rochefort sang a verse of the song about Sophie. She insisted, "Tu connais les stances où la femme est objet sexuel qu'on jette:

*Quand j't'ai rencontrée, un soir dans la rue  
Que tu dégueulais dans tous les ruisseau  
Ah si j'avais su  
Que tu n'étais qu'une grue!  
Je t'aurais fait passer par le trou des goguenots!  
Ah, toi, que j'aimais tant  
J't'emmerde, j't'emmerde,  
Ah, toi, que j'aimais tant,  
J't'emmerde à présent!*

7. References to Valéry's famous line occur twice in *Les Stances à Sophie*. On page 146: "C'est moi, Céline Rodes. Et où est Madame Philippe Aignan? Madame est

sortie. A cinq heures. Elle est sortie, à cinq heures, elle est allée chez Madame Jean-Pierre Bigeon (Julia Morelli)." And again on p 225: "Comme adresse j'ai donné celle de Thomas, j'allais parfois chez lui. Madame est sortie à cinq heures." In both instances, the citation serves as a reminder of the subtle power of narrative to create the illusion of reality and of the illusion of the notion of reality itself.

#### CHAPTER 4 ROCHEFORT'S MIDDLE PERIOD

"Il faut ré-inventer. Écrire, bref."  
(Christiane Rochefort, *C'est bizarre l'écriture*, 50)

As Christiane Rochefort continued writing novelistic fiction during the 1960s and 1970s, her narrative style as well as her thematic focus began to evolve. This chapter addresses some of those developments concerning the tensions and intentions created through dialogic interaction of the textual voices fundamental to Rochefortian narrative. As centers of authority shift among these textual voices, at times even breaking down into what can seem chaotic, ludic mayhem, and as norms and conventions are called into question, analysis turns to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and its insistence on the parodic and even the ribald.

In contrast with Rochefort's earlier texts, this second group of novels is set in a different historical time in French society and departs from her earlier penchant for first person narration. More open-ended narratives focus on plurality existing within specific social groups. Rather than concerns of an individual, the utopian chronotope figures importantly in two of the novels where tension is set up among the multiple voices as they present visions of a desired, imaginary society and, at the same time, recognize the impossibility of actually realizing it.

Further tension arises as various voices, often including the narrative voice, issue from indefinite pronouns, underlining the anonymity of the individual often

lost in meaningless group activity, and as openness to progress and the future are counterbalanced with sameness and anonymity. With regard to the narrative voice, the Bakhtinian concept of *heteroglossia* is particularly helpful in examining the blending of narrative voice with that of various fictional characters in continuing instances of double voicedness. Finally, discussion examines the self-conscious voice of the narrative itself as it considers its own activity during increasing instances of metatextual musing.

Rocheport's second group of novels documents, in fictional format, the space/time defined by a liberated, post World War France of capitalist consumerism, as well as by the events and conditions of those months preceding, and immediately following, the social and political upheaval of 1968. The novels recreate, through their fictional voices, the tension resulting from the co-existence of conflicting ideologies marking this period of French history.

In spite of underlying uneasiness regarding contemporary social and political issues, (such as fear of nuclear destruction, problems of pollution, decolonization and an influx of immigrants to work in French factories), the general mood of the country was one of optimism about the future and about increased opportunity for everyone. Hardy economic growth begun in the 1950s continued into the 1960s and brought with it rising standards of living and an expanding labor market. At the same time, there was a growing sense of frustration, disappointment and discontent as disparities in aspirations and actual living and working conditions became more and more apparent. Years of economic growth that had brought rapid industrial and urban development had not produced corresponding improvements in education, working

conditions, or family life, areas of focus in Rochefort's fiction. The image of a unified France supported by adjectives such as *libérée*, *honorable*, and *éternelle*, perpetuated by the rhetoric of Charles de Gaulle as he sought to re-establish his country's *grandeur*, was beginning to collapse.

It was in the context of these paradoxical conditions that the events of May 1968 exploded and that Rochefort's second group of novels was created. In these texts, youthful visions of a possible new society convey an attitude which one critic has referred to as "revolutionary utopianism." (Fallaize 5) Optimism, vision and hopeful potentiality are pitted against pessimism, static resistance, and the harsh realization of the enormous difficulty of effecting any significant change.

This second group of novels, published in the 1960s and 1970s, includes: *Une Rose pour Morrison* (1966), *Printemps au parking* (1969), *Archais ou le jardin étincelant* (1972), and *Heureux qu'on va vers l'été* (1975). Prescient in its depiction of activities surrounding a growing attitude of discontent within the youthful university community in France, Rochefort's *Une Rose pour Morrison* marks the beginning of a change in her narrative style as well as a shift in thematic interest. Published shortly afterward, *Printemps au Parking* continues the focus on concerns of youth as they struggle to break through established social barriers. For the protagonists, a measure of confidence that results from confronting taboos surrounding homosexuality encourages them to question other restrictive social attitudes. Begun before the outbreak of 1968 and completed after those events, the novel provides a testament to a changing mindset as it developed within a certain sector of 1960's French society. This same focus on the voice of rebellious youth

continues in *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*. Here, an entire classroom of children venture off in defiance of restrictions and demeaning attitudes imposed by the adult community. Their insistent voices suggest utopian visions of a new social order. A fourth novel, *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, depicts an imaginary utopia, this time set up through a Rabelaisian juxtaposition of two opposing medieval kingdoms.

In Bakhtinian theory, the utopian novel, or any form of utopian thought, is understood as monologic in that it tends to claim a final truth and thereby deny any dialogue with opposing views about people and the world in which they live. In Bakhtinian thought, as a chronotope, the utopian novel is viewed rather negatively. It is perceived as finalizing time and place, thereby rendering impossible any real sense of historical moment and rejecting the significance of the future as open to change.

Bakhtin discusses two kinds of utopian chronotopes in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", both of which effectively renounce the present moment in favor of a fantasized and enriched past or future. (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 148)<sup>1</sup> For him, utopian thought is a still further negative concept because, if the prescriptive utopia were ever to prove true, life would be reduced to uncreative behavior that could be determined in advance by a set of accepted theories or patterns.

In Rochefort's novels, however, the utopian chronotope takes a somewhat different twist and appears to have other intentions. Her utopias are somewhat unconventional in that they don't finalize or totalize. As she once remarked, "alors, bon, écrire est un des moyens de poser le possible. . . ." (*C'est bizarre l'écriture*, 101)

In both novels, children are the chosen vehicles for instituting changes that will bring about other possibilities. Children, and the young in general, represent hope and potentiality for change. Children, in fact, play a major role throughout the majority of Rochefort's fiction. It is their actions of putting ideas, relationships, hierarchies, and institutions into question, and their desire to experience a different way of being, free of restrictions and taboos, which motivate these narratives.

As Ruth Levitas points out in *The Concept of Utopia*, utopias tell us much about the experience of living in the contemporary society from which they originate. They tell us what lack or absence people feel in their lives that the utopia offers to fulfill through its creative fantasy. She explains that,

utopia is a social construct which arises . . . as a socially constructed response to an *equally* socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it.(181)

Thus, in *Archaios ou le jardin étincelant*, the two over-riding principles governing the new society -- *tout est gratuit* and *tout le monde fait ce qu'il veut* -- reveal a sense of powerlessness among people, a fear of condemnation, a desire for the right to self-actualization, and a feeling of impoverishment with regard to material benefits. In *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, the issues are similar, although this time the focus is on the particular situation of children. Specifically, the novel points to their desire to break free from pre-determined and socially engineered concepts of their identities as human beings and their subservient roles in a society dominated by adults. Their desire to experience their sexuality, to vote, to enjoy "égalité devant la loi," to have "libre choix de l'orientation" and "participation à toutes les décisions" in school, "plein salaire aux apprentis," (220) and so on, points to the denial of these



rights by contemporary society. Their action of running away from school, and from home, implies the existence of undesirable and unacceptable constraints imposed by these traditional institutions on French children, at a time contemporary to the writing and publication of the novel. That is to say, then, these were the conditions within 1960s and 1970s France.

Rocheport's decision to depart from the realism characterizing her earlier novels in favor of a utopian motif, directly relates to the changing social context in twentieth-century France. New prosperity following the war years brought with it a growing fascination with emerging modern technology and material possessions, a blatant consumerism. Many saw this trend as modernity *à l'américaine* and responded with hostility, giving rise to opposition groups on both the right and the left who wished to defend France's traditional identity and cultural values. Forbes and Kelly note, in particular, the populist movement of Pierre Poujade, whose image of the *petit-commerçant* made a powerful appeal to traditional nationalism.<sup>2</sup> In the arts, two phenomena were at work. Popular culture flourished: anarchic *chansonniers* and aggressive, rebellious rock singers dominated the music scene; and a profusion of mass circulation weekly magazines (including such titles as *Elle*, *Marie-France*, *Femmes d'aujourd'hui*, *Paris-Match*, *L'Express*, and *Le Canard Enchaîné*) was launched to respond to special interests and to challenge the more traditional, broad-spectrum press. Then, too, there were efforts within high culture to make it available to the masses, hence, the *Livre de Poche* collection was launched and inexpensive prints of fine art were made available through mass-production. Forbes and Kelly explain that,

one of the most characteristic aspects of modernization is that, in marginalizing all of the social and cultural elements which do not correspond to its modernizing project, it constructs an image of those elements as its Other. While this Other may be despised and excluded, it may also become a focus for the loss and mourning which accompany any process of change, and for any opposition to the direction of change. Invested with the nostalgia of lost innocence or the power of a radical alternative, the primitive and the exotic are the atavistic shadow of the modern. (*French Cultural Studies*, 150)

Responding to an interviewer's question about this thematic and stylistic departure, Rochefort commented, "I think I finally succeeded in building a utopia because there were seeds outside at that moment – the communes and new ideologies of how to live together. I think it gave me the food I needed." (Hirsh, "An Interview with Christiane Rochefort," 114) "I think I'm always sensitive to the environment," she insisted, "I am a sponge plunged in a liquid." (116) And, as Margaret-Anne Hutton has pointed out,

true to the agenda of the New Left with its focus on individual lifestyle and personal relationships, this is a text which suggests that political change, the transformation of the structures of society, are dependent upon a change of consciousness at the level of the individual. (*Christiane Rochefort: Countering the Culture*, 132)

*Heureux qu'on va vers l'été* is based on actuality. As Rochefort related to interviewer Georgiana Colville, the book was based on a real fact: "a schoolteacher's repeated putdown of her class." (*Women Writers Talking*, 223) It fictionalizes the plight of children in contemporary French society that Rochefort describes and documents in her theoretical text, published the following year, *Les Enfants d'abord*. (1979)<sup>3</sup> Despite the variance in their dates of publication, Rochefort worked on the two books during the same time period. She, reportedly, interrupted the writing of her novel to compose the book-length essay, feeling an increasing need to

vent her anger as the novel got underway. It is not surprising then that the two books share a significant amount of material.

Rocheport's *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, rather than fantasizing past or future, posits a vision of an alternative society in which past, present and future voices collide to suggest a possible harmony in which individuals might live together. Her own opinion of the book is that it is "the most positive of my books. The other ones criticize; this one is a suggestion of a world . . . of the irrational and the other way of thinking and feeling." (Hirsh, "An Interview with Christiane Rocheport," (114) "*Archaos* is a work about groups," she explains. (115)

By structuring the novel into three sections, Rocheport sets up tension among those voices representing three different visions of society. The first section introduces the repressive kingdom of Avatar, "le Roi Père;" the second presents the more progressive regime of Govan, "le Roi Fils;" and the third describes the utopic new society of Archaos, a kingdom without a real "king." Effectively, the novel juxtaposes voices of the past, present, and future. In a mimetic "showing" of all three, the anonymous, heterodiegetic narrator would leave their evaluation or interpretation to the implied narratee. In a metatextual moment, that implied narratee is even reminded, by a final exchange among the novel's characters, that the narrative to which he has just been exposed is, indeed, a fantasy.

Sus à Archaos! Dit le général.  
 -- Chut, il ne faut pas prononcer ce nom.  
 -- Pourquoi?  
 -- Archaos n'existe pas, monsieur. (442)

In this same exchange, opposing voices point again to the tension between those groups who are able to envision this new utopian society and those who not only

deny its existence but who refuse even to allow the possibility of its existence to be acknowledged by the mere articulation of its name.

Mirroring the context from which they evolved, the novels of this second group are more complex than Rochefort's earlier ones. Their focus on tensions within society, and particularly group movements toward subversion of existing political and social order, also allies these novels to the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque. In reference to this preoccupation with group dynamics, Rochefort explained that,

we must first recognize that things are as they are. After acknowledging the situation, we can try to work on the problem in groups. For instance, we can gather individual personal experiences and try to find solutions together. I don't think a person can do it alone. (Hirsh, "An Interview with Christiane Rochefort," 120)

As Bakhtin notes in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," the image of man is always intrinsically chronotropic. In defining the term, Bakhtin states that it is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 84) In other words, the chronotope functions as the organizing center for narrative. Additionally, like most terms characteristic of Bakhtinian dialogism, chronotope can be understood to function at different levels: as a lens for close-up analysis, and as an optic through which to observe at a distance. In this latter sense then, chronotope can function as a means for studying the relation between text and context.

Pausing to consider the concept of chronotope as a means for examining the relation between text and context, it is not surprising to note affinities between Rochefort's literary aesthetic and other popular artistic trends of the twentieth

century. Responding to transformations experienced by the novel and other art forms during the twentieth century, changes which in turn reflect movements or shifts in society, Rochefort's fiction begins to move away from its earlier basis in mimetic realism toward less narrative coherence and more fantasized images of an unfinalizable future. As the next chapter will illustrate, this aspect of unfinalizability, or becoming, will be even more significant in Rochefort's final group of narratives.

Although Rochefort's novels cannot be classified as belonging to any particular aesthetic group or literary movement, the influence of postmodernism is perhaps particularly evident in her later narratives. For the most part, these novels tend to stray from traditional patterns of characterization or of story and resolution. Language, with its attendant supposition, suggestion, allusion, inference, connotation, nuance, ambiguity, and intention, is foregrounded for its role in social conditioning and in communicative breakdown. It serves as an organizing focus for Rochefort's novelistic narrative. As Michael Holquist aptly points out,

there is not only a 'political unconscious,' but what might be called a 'chronotopic unconscious,' a set of unspoken assumptions about the coordinates of our experience so fundamental that they lie even deeper (and therefore may ultimately be more determining) than the prejudices of imposed ideology. In fact, the two may be coterminous. (142)

These assumptions organize behavior on a level as fundamental as when and how to eat, sleep and perform daily routine. Therefore, and as Rochefort's fiction illustrates, beliefs about the nature of time/space itself condition the very language people speak.

Rochefort's characters existentially resist prescriptive thought and behavior, struggling to create and redefine themselves through their acts and their words. They

experience a kind of alienation, a sense of disharmony or disfunction within what often seems an absurdly organized world. Kristin Ross, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, asserts that the pervasive phenomenon of capitalist modernization accounts for this modern sentiment of estrangement. Ross argues that major intellectual productions of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as fictional literature of the period, reflect attitudes and reactions to the influences of American-style capitalist modernization that dominated French society at that time. She contends that the process of modernizing, at all levels of economic and social life, resulted in a general consensuality (evident in new norms of regularity, conformity, and homogeneity). Precipitation to accept and incorporate new technology and new ways of thinking, to modernize or adopt an American life-style, however, resulted in a general sense of powerlessness and lack of individuality.<sup>4</sup>

Among the artists and thinkers who "historicized their era at the time and who gave full voice to the debates and controversies surrounding modernization," (13) Ross specifically notes novelists Simone de Beauvoir, Georges Perec<sup>5</sup> and Christiane Rochefort. Even in Rochefort's earliest novels, characters struggle against trends in society toward homogenization and depersonalization. Ross further remarks that theirs was a new kind of realist mode that attempted "to come to terms with, or to give an historical account of, the fatigue and exhilaration of moments when people find themselves living two lives at once . . . a voice to those who live in a different temporality, who follow a pace of life that is nonsynchronous with the dominant one." (13) This last reference would appropriately be associated with the elementary

school children of *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* and the restless university students of *Une Rose pour Morrison* and *Printemps au parking*.

As the four novels of this period move toward plurality and group dynamics, they tend to introduce a notably increased number of characters. The characters make up a number of disparate groups including, for example, adults, children, males, females, administrative figures, politicians, students, working-class citizens, deviants, conformists, stasis seekers, rebels, mythological figures, "real" people or actual individuals contemporary to the writing, and even mysteriously undesignated or anonymous voices. There are twenty-five specifically named characters in *Une Rose pour Morrison*, plus a number of anonymous voices. Sixteen named characters appear in *Le Printemps au parking* along with, again, a number of nameless voices. In *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* no less than seventy-one names figure as participants. Some of these characters "become" other characters (as they role-play, for example). Some are called by several names (as their experiences cause them to change, a new name seems only an appropriate reflection of that). Some are occasionally referred to as animals (perhaps some affinity can be suggested here as well). This novel, too, incorporates a significant number of undesignated voices. In *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, a troupe of eighty-six characters, all meticulously listed at the beginning of the novel like a cast list prefacing a stage play, share in the dialogic interaction.

Stylistically, and in direct relation to the multiplicity and anonymity, a significant increase in the appearance of indefinite personal pronouns marks the

novels of this period. In Perec-like style, passages structured through anaphoric *entassement* like the following in *Une Rose pour Morrison* are common.

Quelqu'un craqua une allumette et demanda si quelqu'un avait une cigarette. Ils étaient en effet dans la cave du Tu Bar, et pas propres. Quelqu'un tendit une cigarette. Quelqu'un d'autre en voulut aussi. Quelqu'un donna du feu. Quelqu'un proposa des cigarettes au gingembre, et il y eut un petit silence. Quelqu'un accepta. Chaque fois que quelqu'un donnait du feu, on voyait un visage. C'était très joli. Quelqu'une dit d'une voix éffrayée. On est en prison! On la rassura. (41)

Voices often issue from these pronouns, setting up tension for the reader who must try to determine both the source and importance of the voices in question. In this same novel, for example, one early chapter begins with an anaphoric alternation of the indefinite pronouns *quelqu'un* and *on*, interspersed with tags such as, "dit une voix," "dit une autre," and "dit quelqu'un" or "quelqu'une." (Whether the gender difference evidenced by the change in the last pronoun, "quelqu'une," is intended to indicate separate voices or whether the occurrence is an intentional grammatical transgression is not clear. In any case, the insertion functions as a marking of the feminine.) Two pages later this scene is repeated, with the nameless *visage* coming more clearly out of the shadows.

Quelqu'un demanda si quelqu'un avait une cigarette. Quelqu'un en offrit. Quelqu'un proposa au gingembre. Quelqu'un accepta. Quelqu'un donna du feu, et chaque fois, un jeune visage sort de l'ombre, beau et silencieux. (43)

In this scene, no words are actually spoken or even indirectly stated. The entire "conversation" takes place in the shadows, among nameless figures, in an ambiance of silence that is valorized by the words "beau et silencieux." Where, in Perec, an empty-headed accumulation of material things is seen to drive the characters, here



the accumulation of indefinite pronouns tends to underscore the loss of personal identity among characters who seem lost in meaningless activity.

Anonymity in the novel extends beyond the vagueness of pronouns to include voices mysteriously originating from unexpected places. These curious voices often emerge, through the combination of their messages and the context from which they issue, as symbolic of groups toward which the narrator is sympathetic and mark shifts among centers of narrative authority. In a concretization of metaphor reminiscent of Beckett's *Fin de partie*, one of these is the little voice from within the trashcan or *poubelle* (146). It can be understood to represent youth, discarded, mistreated, undervalued, and ignored. When the child within finally emerges, he explains, "C'est pour ça que je suis venu. . . . Pour causer avec une autre génération. On se sent tout seul. Personne ne sait rien." (164) <sup>6</sup> Once out of the silence and isolation of the garbage can, he still stinks to the others, but he can finally breathe. He optimistically senses that his experience has been instructional: "Ça valait la peine de rester des heures là-dedans avec des vers et la trouille que le broyeur passe avant toi. Putasse, j'étais pas bien. Maintenant je respire." (164) The message seems clear: that to assert one's voice, to speak and be heard (even though one's words may be regarded disdainfully) is to breathe and to live. The speaker's use of the slang *putasse* indicates a regional voice or accent typical of the inhabitants of southern France or the Midi. This regionalism would oppose the speaker to the more dominant Parisian voice where the slang would have been *putain* or even the abbreviated *pute* rather than *putasse*.

Another shift in narrative authority occurs as the mysterious voice emanating from behind the wall and ceiling attempts to impose itself authoritatively into the diegesis (169-173). This voice behind the wall represents any faceless authority that would silence individual resistance to the status quo or independent thought that might question or usurp that authority. It drones:

il n'y a qu'à te laisser faire, nous pensons pour toi. Ne résiste plus.  
Viens avec nous, nous sommes tes amis. Abandonne-toi. Laisse-nous  
faire, nous sommes tes amis. Ne résiste pas. Si tu résistes tu tomberas  
malade et tu feras entrer en toi les forces de désordre qui tentent de  
détruire. . . . (170)

The anonymity suggests simultaneously conformity (within the anonymous crowd) and subversion. The seductive rhetoric seeks to impose its will to control any hapless listener. In a tone of familiarity and in pretense of friendship established through the use of the personal *tu* form, the voice cajoles: *nous sommes tes amis. . . . Laisse-nous faire*. It invites the listener to relax and "be himself": *abandonne-toi. . . . Ne résiste pas*. It threatens illness and destruction for non-compliance: *si tu résistes tu tomberas malade et tu feras en toi les forces de désordre qui tentent de détruire*. To whom the personal pronoun *tu* is addressed is unclear. It could, then, possibly implicate not only a character within the diegesis, but the implied reader.

Only the character Pina dares to resist this incessant attempt at indoctrination by reacting both verbally and physically. Shifting the center of authority back to a representative of the victimized youths, she retorts,

ne les écoute pas ce sont des vieux. Vieux vieux vieux sales vieux.  
N'écoute pas la voix, n'écoute pas la voix. . . . Elle chercha le trou du  
mur. . . . Elle trouva dans sa poche un vieux haricot. . . . Elle écrasa le  
vieux haricot dans le trou. La voix disparut. (172)

Still other anonymous voices seeded throughout the novel are present in the clichés that represent, as Rochefort has noted, prevailing "truths" or ideology that by virtue of their familiarity and claim of universal truth would force a silence of unquestioning acceptance. At one point in the text, in an Ionesco-like exchange reminiscent of surrealist absurdity, Philibert has the following carnivalesque repartee with the authorities who arrive on an unannounced raid.

--On ne joue pas avec le feu sans se casser les oeufs  
 --Il n'y a pas d'omelette sans feu  
 --Il faut casser l'oeuf quand il fait chaud  
 --Qui chasse deux lièvres a la foi (sic)  
 --Qui veut ravager loin menace la nature  
 --Un bon tiens vaut mieux que ceinture dorée  
 --A bon char bon roi. (101-102)

In this scene, ludic play with accepted "truths" again sets up tension between facile conformity and underlying subversion. For the reader, who is assumed to be familiar with the original proverbs<sup>7</sup>, the characters' distorted versions satirically point to the essential meaninglessness of any such attempts at prescriptive dogma. Perhaps even more significantly, the series of "cracked clichés" effectively stops any further interrogation or communication. It silences the participants, leaving them speechless. As the narrator notes, the police, left with no idea how to follow up or even to conclude what they themselves have initiated, simply turn around and leave. What does one say after an exchange of this sort?

Silence, too, can function as a means of authoritatively imposing one's voice. At times silence is a conscious refusal to enter current discourse or debate. Single and group voices participate in this willed silence. One of these is the character ironically named Sereine: "Sereine ne répondit pas. Elle avait ses raisons, de faire

ça."(38) Sometimes it represents the pleasure of private reflection, "ensuite, ils restèrent silencieux, à penser ensemble."(105) Sometimes it functions as a way of not saying something undesirable: "Théostat ne répondit pas car il était occupé à faire l'exercice de non-réponse."(28) The unspoken, however, can be discerned. Sereine's smile in the following passage indicates that she understands the message "spoken" by their silence.

--Avez-vous bien fait vos devoirs mes enfants? dit-elle.  
La réponse fut un silence total. Elle sourit. (64)

To draw attention to moments of communicative silence, Rochefort makes simple use of blank textual space. A page and a half of blank space represents the unspoken enigma within a character, and the narrator follows his introduction into the narration with these words:

il n'était pas du tout celui que l'on croyait. Il s'appelait Druise. Il allait faire son rapport. Qui l'eût regardé de près eût aperçu sur sa lèvre errer un léger sourire silencieux et fort. Mais il n'y avait personne à faire ça, par bonheur. Le secret de Druise ne serait pas percé ce soir-là. (39)

To fully appreciate the extended silence provided by the writer in the large textual space that follows, the reader must be attentive to this carefully constructed passage that precedes it. The passage is replete with mystery and seduction. Tenses reserved for the indefinite and the elusive, the *imparfait* and the *subjonctif*, as well as indefinite pronouns predominate: *celui, on, qui, personne*. The little smile "wandering" lightly over the character's lips is teasingly emblematic of his interior rumination. His name, Druise, recalls the ancient Celtic priests or Druids, believed to be possessors of knowledge and oracular powers. The character does not speak; his silence is resolute and taunting behind the little smile. Yet, no one even sees him, or

the little smile. No one, that is, except the implied reader. The darkness of the night setting easily hides his movements and the secret he does not wish to reveal. After the page and a half of blank textual space, the narrative resumes with *quelqu'un*, prolonging the tension and mystery created by the silence surrounding this character.

Sometimes the fullness of the silence in textual space is symbolically indicated by the image of a sphere drawn in the center of the space, as is the case after an allusion to a sexual encounter between Sereine and Calande (45), and another between Triton and Chantal.(135) Occasionally, the sphere added to the blank space serves to emphatically punctuate the end of a narrative insertion in which the voice of the implied author has authoritatively intruded to offer comments or observations such as, "l'éducation des enfants est très très difficile." (130) Other times, it prompts the reader to pause and silently visualize suggested images, such as the following:

la photographie en 21/27 d'une fille blonde, aux cheveux courts, avec une point devant chaque oreille (60)

Senile remonté de frais se présenta devant les caméras, afin de rassurer le peuple (93)

Et elle était si belle qu'elle faisait peur (159)

Mais Ruines ne répondait pas. Ruines était sous son bureau, avec une petite ficelle autour du cou (242)

Another novel in which anonymous voices and silences figure importantly is Rochefort's utopian *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*. Frequent here too are narrative tags such as: "elle se tut" (68), "elle resta sans voix" and "Régina qui se taisait" (69), and "hurlèrent quelques-uns" (220). Sometimes, particularly at the beginning of the novel, the self-imposed silence results from the children's lack of

confidence in their own voices of rebellion. Other times their silence stems from the inadequacy of language to express feelings and the recognition that deeper communication is achieved through other means: "A ce moment-là, Manuel et Jean-Marie ne s'étaient pas encore dit un mot. Ils étaient parfaitement au-delà du langage." (152) Still other times, the silence is enforced. The vague pronoun *ils* has no specific antecedent and evokes the notion of institutional forces or malevolent hierarchical powers that would suppress individuality or dissent. Perhaps the character Druse sums it up best when he remarks, "Ils ont volé nos mots et ils les ont tués. . . . Et à nous il reste ce qui n'a pas de mots. Ce qui est. L'inexprimé. . . . Ce qui est clair, ce n'est pas ce qui se comprend." (62)

Frequently the anonymity occurs in encounters among unidentified participants, (usually the voices of children). At times the voices of the different participants are indicated only by a dash at the beginning of each utterance. Other times, even this marker is omitted, allowing the voices to meld obscurely into the narration, and giving them an ubiquitous quality.

Le soleil se leva devant elles comme elles arrivaient à découvert.  
Leurs yeux contemplaient un paysage antique, verdoyant, vallonné de  
vergers et de prés où traînaient des brumes, la prairie scintillait, un  
ruisseau coulait en bas. Et pas une âme en vue.

Je ne savais pas que ça existait encore des choses pareilles. Comme  
dans les peintures... tu crois que je rêve?

C'est merveilleux, moi aussi. Sans arrêt. (71-72)

Here, unnamed voices (identified only by the personal pronouns *je*, *tu*, and *moi*) pick up the narrative thought and, unhesitatingly, permit its continuation by revoicing it.

Noticeably absent in this novel are the parents of the children. Only near the end of the book do the parents' voices directly insert themselves as a boisterous

group on television. In a kind of reversal of traditional roles, the parents, sounding like spoiled children arguing possessively over their toys, selfishly demand, "rendez-nous nos enfants!"(213) Even here, however, adult voices are muffled by those of youthful agitators who mimic adult behavior and shout contrary demands. Little textual space, in fact, is directly given over to any adult voices, even undesignated ones. When it is, their person is often derogatorily reduced to the status of object in tags such as "dit un passant chenu" and "dit le bérét" (52), or "dit l'homme dans un genre d'uniforme" and "dit le garde, figure de bois."(109)

Adult voices, however, do enter the dialogic mix obliquely as the children take turns at role-playing. Bakhtin's concept of double-voicedness, another form of heteroglossia, is useful here in reading "through" the intentional hybrid of discourses. In a humorous layering of voices, the errant children parody adult attitudes by refracting recalled adult utterances through the optic of their youthful lenses.

Le mien suce tout le temps son pouce je suis désespérée Madame.  
Mettez-lui de la moutarde dessus.  
Hélas, il aime ça.  
De l'ipéca alors, c'est très mauvais.  
Il aime ça aussi, quel malheur!  
Il aime trop de choses votre bébé Madame il risque d'être heureux  
plus tard c'est affreux, il faut lui donner des fessées. (91)

As Morson and Emerson explain, double-voiced words allow us to "sense the discourse of the other" and, by introducing into that discourse an opposing intention, create "an arena of battle between two voices."(*Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, 152) This is particularly evident as the children spontaneously take turns in a series of carnivalesque role-reversals by echoing a litany of "typical" adult remarks that would make any child cringe.

- Nous sommes incompréhensibles. Ma pauvre fille je ne te comprendrai jamais, tu l'as pas entendue celle-là?
- Je me demande, parfois, comment tu as pu sortir de moi. (A vrai dire moi aussi je me le demande, entre parenthèses.)
- Les enfants sont d'étranges petits animaux.
- Aussi faut-il les dresser, dès leur plus jeune âge.
- Sinon la vie s'en chargera tu vas voir ma fille!
- Je crois qu'en ce cas je préfère la vie, papa.
- Toi on ne te demande pas ton opinion. (37-38)

These vignettes also recall Bakhtin's concept of carnival folk humor during which participants mimicked serious rituals, imposed forms of protocol, and any other aspect of officialdom by participating in derisive role-reversals. As Bakhtin reminds us, "carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it.... carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter." (*Rabelais and His World* 7,8) In these ironic passages, mocking voices of role-playing youngsters deride the haughty authoritarianism of absent parents by reiterating their demeaning and condescending phrases. One could imagine that these same adults may have only been repeating, in their turn, what previous adults/authority figures had said to them and wonder just how deeply the layers of voices might be stacked.

In a self-reflexive moment, a letter is abruptly inserted into the narration, calling the reader's attention to the fact that we too, as readers, are drawn into a novel in a willing suspension of disbelief, in a universe that is imagined yet based on the real. In the letter, adult voices appear to obliquely enter the dialogic mix as its anonymous authors. The letter is enigmatically signed as being from "une partie de la population." The center of authority shifts again as this assemblage of unacknowledged voices expresses alliance with the children's cause:

*nous faisons savoir aux tenants de l'autorité, officiels ou non, que nous nourrirons, cacherons, et protégerons contre toutes leurs*



*aggressions les enfants qui ont eu l'esprit assez droit pour leur échapper.*

*Vous nous excuserez de ne pas vous donner nos noms et nos adresses. (223)*

Interestingly, the letter is not addressed to anyone. It begins, as *in medias res*, with a question: "la vraie question est: préférons-nous nos enfants loin et vivants, ou avec nous et morts?" (223) At the end of the letter, the narrator informs with the tag "lut la vieille dame" that this letter has just been read aloud by an unnamed woman. Very shortly afterward, however, through a series of exchanges, s/he reveals that the letter and the woman reading it, both, exist only as part of the character's childish dream. Reacting as though she has just seen a bubble burst, or has just pulled herself suddenly out of reverie or a day-dream, Grace abruptly remarks:

--Ce coup-ci alors vraiment je rêve, dit Grâce. dégoûtée. Ce n'est pas vrai je n'y crois pas, même en rêve ça n'est pas possible.

Elle se leva avec gravité.

--Est-ce que vous êtes un rêve? dit-elle à la vieille dame.

--Evidemment que j'en suis un, as-tu déjà vu une chose comme moi dans la réalité? et au vingtième siècle? (224)

Dreams are, in fact, another important narrative development introduced into Rochefort's fiction of this period, specifically in her two utopian novels *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* and *Archaos, ou le jardin étincelant*. The incorporation of dreams for narrative development has a long history in world literature. As Bakhtin has pointed out in his discussion of Dostoevsky's work,

the dream is introduced there precisely as the *possibility* of a completely different life, a life organized according to laws different from those governing ordinary life (sometimes directly as an "inside-out world"). The life seen in the dream makes ordinary life seem strange, forces one to understand and evaluate ordinary life in a new way (in the light of a glimpsed possibility). (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 147)

Presentation of alternative possibility is, in fact, the significance of Grace's dream incident in *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, a desired or utopian scenario.

Dream occurrences in *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant* are enigmatic and often are also referred to as visions. The characters who experience these dreams or visions are themselves puzzled by them. The role, then, of interpreter of dreams is turned over to the implied reader of the text. For the characters, these dream/visions function to blur distinction between "reality" and illusion. Govan, the new king, for example, remarks at a meeting of his advisors, "je rêvais. Ou bien c'est maintenant que je rêve, car vous me semblez tous très étranges. . . ."(160) Another character, Héliozone, has a similar experience. She tells Govan, "en rêve, je me suis revu là, comme si c'était un étranger." (355)

Other times, the character's unconscious fears are played out in brief dream segments. Again concerning the king Govan, the narrator relates that,

il rêva qu'on le couronnait et il n'arrivait pas à se rappeler la devise sacrée d'Archaos. Enfin elle lui revint, et s'éveillant en sursaut il s'entendit prononcer à la place la formule magique. Il se précipita vers ses appartements, sûr d'être horriblement en retard à la cérémonie.  
(160)

Later, he wonders aloud to his companions, "ai-je rêvé que je rêvais?"(162)

A particularly enigmatic dream is experienced by one of Govan's men, Ganidan. The narrator informs that, "Ganidan eut une vision: il vit un chat sur le cheval de Govan." (159) This symbolism of the cat continues to recur throughout the rest of the novel as Govan responds with *miaou* to various queries by other characters. The cat seems symbolic of enigma itself. Long associated with sorcery

and unaccountable feminine wiles, the king/cat proves not only self-centered but a little crazy. The narrator intones,

Qu'un chat folâtre fût le roi véritable d'Archaios . . . le secret en fut gardé avec soin par les témoins, avec l'aide de la providentielle loi contre les visions, qu'Avatar avait oublié d'abroger.

Ainsi entra Govan, sous le nom public d'Eremetus Premier, dans son règne par le bas, environné d'un parfum de scandale, de déraison, de vin, et de diverses autres sortes de liqueurs car il n'avait pas eu le temps d'un bain. (165)

Indeed, it is Govan's penchant toward seeming folly that distinguishes his reign from that of his father. All the logic that ruled the former kingdom now seems unacceptable to Govan. He announces to his advisors that "la logique n'est pas logique. Il faut changer ça." (168) This problem of logic is directly related to language. To Ganidan, his newly appointed *sénéchal*, he says, "si tu as une vision de chat, pince-moi. . . . Je n'entends plus le langage humain." (169) "C'est symbolique," the minister responds. (169) When Govan reminds Ganidan that he has promised to work for the good of the people, the minister responds again, "c'était symbolique." (171) They agree and decide to get drunk instead. Throughout the second section of the novel, Govan continues to metamorphose between human and cat forms.

Several other characters also experience symbolic dreams that result in a blurring of identities and questioning of existing situations or "realities." In the case of Jérémias, for example, a dream graphically enacts in sexual terms the forceful submission of one ideology to another. A naive society ruled by an economy of shared labors is overwhelmed and repeatedly raped by a drunken, selfish economy ruled by the idea that everyone should have everything s/he wants for free.

La nuit il rêvait qu'il tannait. Economie de Gratuité, putain ivre, s'introduisait chez Economie de Partage, la jeune vierge, et la

pénétrait de partout dans un enlacement immonde. Rêves odieux, dont Jérémias s'éveillait brisé plus que s'il n'eût dormi du tout." (305)

Incorporation of the dream element, introduced in these two novels, will be further developed in Rochefort's last group of novels where the unconscious, the unspoken, and the dream play primary roles.

The narrative voice, in this novel, is often problematic. A risk in novelistic fiction is that these frequent narratorial intrusions can become bothersome for the reader and tend to shift authority away from the characters. This criticism has been directed at Rochefort's style, particularly with regard to the children in *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*. As Hutton has pointed out, "Rochefort's desire to represent the child as subject may be considered to be partially undermined by intrusive narratorial comments which recur throughout the work." (*The Novels of Christiane Rochefort* 172) In fact, the repeated narrative intrusions do tend to shift the focus of attention away from the children as speaking subjects in their own right.

The problem is more complex, however, and can perhaps be elucidated by returning again to Bakhtinian concepts that were discussed earlier. This blending of voices or incursion of one voice into another that can be discerned within the content, style or tone of the character's utterance, are instances of what Bakhtin has referred to as double voicing, a kind of dialogism or polyphony. As he explains in "Discourse in the Novel,"

for the prose writer, the object is a condensation of heterological voices among which his own voice must also resound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, without which his literary nuances would not be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'. (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 91-92)

This intrusion of one voice into another, a kind of usurping of authority, can be seen as transgressive. These instances, then, also figure importantly as yet another manifestation of the general carnivalesque spirit that marks the novel as a genre in Bakhtinian thought. Whether these polyphonic or heteroglossic instances result in loss of individual voice, shifting of authority, or blending of individual voices into group ones, the aberration, transformation, and general ambiguity characteristic of carnival are important.

Speech acts, or utterances, are never objectively neutral, never free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, never without the influence and/or presence of other voices. For Bakhtin, the word is "the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction." (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 202) At the base of dialogics, is double-voiced discourse or the word with "its intense sideward glance at someone else's word." (203) Bakhtin offers this explanation:

this "sideward glance" manifests itself above all in two traits characteristic of the style: a certain halting quality to the speech, and its interruption by reservations. (205)

This sideward glance at socially alien discourse determines the style and tone of the speech utterance, as well as a manner of thinking and understanding. The consciousness of one self is perceived against the consciousness of another. These sideward glancing words are often accented by syntactical markers or breaking points: italics, underscoring, quotation marks, parenthesis, interjections, ellipsis, separation by commas. They can appear as "loopholes," interruptions, repetitions, reservations, and, occasionally, long-windedness. These loopholes only contribute to

the overall ambiguity of the character and, particularly with regard to the voice of the author/narrator, tend to make all of his self-assertions unstable.

As in Rochefort's earlier novels, the narrating voice is fractured. In these novels, however, the splitting results not from a schizophrenic struggle for identity as in her earlier novels, but from the narrator's multiple roles as both purveyor and interpreter of the diegesis and as philosopher offering intermittent observations and comments on life in general. At times, the narrator slips into an almost breathless harangue in frustration with what s/he considers unacceptable social condition affecting the characters. In the following quote, this extra-diegetic narrator adopts a complicitous mode by combining *on* and *vous* to voice discontentment with regard to police activity toward the general citizenry. S/he pits a faceless yet powerful establishment against the youthful characters of the diegesis as well as against implied extra-diegetic, and also youthful, readers. During the narrator's digression, verb tenses slip into present tense, contributing further to a sense of urgency with regard to the state of affairs. The situation, like the run-on sentence, appears out of control.

AriaBelle et Galice, voyant qu'ils ne pouvaient rien pour lui, dirent au revoir à Théostat, et les jeunes gens partirent de leur côté, pas plus de trois ensemble car sur la voie publique c'est mal vu, pas vraiment interdit mais on peut *vous* demander *vos* papiers et on n'est jamais sûr d'être en règle sur les derniers arrêtés préfectoraux qui changent tout le temps et ils peuvent *vous* emmener et *vous* garder à vue sans avoir besoin de *vous* accuser de quelque chose de précis ni de *vous* faire un procès ni de *vous* donner un avocat ni rien . . . et si *vous vous* plaignez *vous* n'aurez pas raison au contraire il peut *vous* arriver encore pire.  
(47)

Throughout the entire passage following the comma (after "et les jeunes gens partirent de leur côté"), the narrator looks sideways toward the implied reader.

Other times, the narrator offers comments on the actions or attitudes of the characters themselves. The commentary of the implied author in the next citation, for example, is again separated from the more straightforward narrative purveyance of the diegesis by a comma (my italics).

puis voyant bien là qu'elle n'avait pas entravé leurs hautes discussions il ajouta qu'on n'était pas là pour la concerner et conclut que le travail avant tout, *conclusion peu en rapport avec la lascivité des événements récents.*(58)

Here, as in the following passage during which Grace and Régina pose as boys, repeated interjection of interpretative remarks tends to draw attention away from the children's voices and give the "punch lines" to an omniscient narrator (my italics):

-- Oui monsieur, merci, dirent les gars, ils trinquèrent et levèrent le coude, *dans le fond c'est pas dur d'avoir l'air d'un garçon, c'est une question de gestes, y a qu'à en faire trop et parler plus fort.*(99)

And again, with reference to a narrow-minded store guard, the narrator intervenes to offer a critical opinion (my italics):

Interdit aux enfants non accompagnés, dit l'homme dans un genre d'uniforme, devant l'entrée du super-marché. . . . Pourquoi? Dit Agnès. C'est comme ça, dit le garde, figure de bois, *on n'a pas à donner de raisons au peuple, pense sans penser le garde n'ayant pas en tête, que la mission dont il est investi et qui constitue la totalité de son sentiment d'exister.* . . . (109)

Parentheses provide another "sideways glance" or venue for extradiegetic commentary, particularly in *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*. Again, the narrator's words seem to look sideways toward the implied reader in search of complicity of opinion, desirous of understanding. The opposition of the two voices, character and narrator, gives an ironic tone to the passage. The parenthetical remarks attached to

the following citations function as humorous asides directed at the various characters' utterances.

--Je me demande, parfois, comment tu as pu sortir de moi. (A vrai dire moi aussi je me le demande, entre parenthèses) (37).

--Hier autrefois, j'ai piqué une boussole, juste pour me marrer. Eh bien si je piquais une boussole maintenant, ça aurait un sens (le nord). (42)

Sometimes the parenthetical remarks are obtrusively inserted as little tags attached to the characters' utterances with the intention of pointing out the bias of those voices represented. In the following excerpt, for example, the tags gloss the content of each remark as to its support or non-support of the children's actions.

--Les enfants sont indociles, c'est leur nature, alors est-ce qu'il va falloir les enfermer à clé? Moi je m'y refuse!

--Ça oui, dit une autre mère (alliée).

--Ça va les rendre fous.

--On signale déjà plusieurs cas, qu'on a dû mettre à l'hôpital (allié).

--Mais ça ne peut tout de même pas continuer comme ça il faut que ça cesse! (non allié).

--On ne peut quand même pas les laisser faire ce qu'ils veulent (non allié). (237)

In *Printemps au parking* and *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, these parenthetical asides also occasionally slip into both narration and dialogue. Beyond their satiric humor, now and then these remarks extend metatextual explication. For example in this passage:

ce que je veux dire, ce qui est intéressant (je ne prétends pas que le reste ne le soit pas (dieu non) (il l'est, c'est un ravissement) j'essaye seulement d'être un peu pudique, dans la mesure du possible, qui n'est pas grand je le reconnais, dès l'instant qu'on a résolu de tout dire) c'est qu'ensuite, une fois fait, on en avait encore plein la figure et déjà on se demandait: Pourquoi avoir fait une pareille histoire? On ne le comprenait plus du tout. (*Printemps*, 208)



Not infrequently, the narrator's and implied author's voices blend on occasions when s/he simply inserts his/her philosophy directly into the narration as a separate, but related thought. At one point, in an optimistic mood, the narrator of *Une Rose pour Morrison* offers the optimistic prediction that, "à l'Avenir les choses seront plus faciles, l'Avenir a toujours toutes les veines, le temps et la science travaillent pour lui."(126) A little later s/he drily observes that, "l'éducation des enfants est très très difficile"(130) and that, in fact, "la vie est difficile, voilà tout."(139)

Occasionally, authorial intrusions take the form of rhetorical questions. For example, after relating that Théostat is in love with Sereine (as well as with Amok), the situation receives the following commentary:

Il l'aimait.  
Ça voulait dire quoi?  
Peu importe.(135)

In other words, the implied author suggests through the narrator's comments: what's the big deal about someone being bisexual?

In *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été*, Rochefort's narrator, although speaking as omniscient purveyor of the diegesis, seems to slip circuitously into that diegesis upon occasion. Early on, the slippage of pronouns makes the narrator's position unclear. Out of the silence, as the group of children embark on their mass exodus, the narration begins with *on*: "ils seront tous sûrs qu'on est en sortie officielle."(13) From *on*, the narration slips into *nous*: "Quand ils nous verront couverts de poils il nous reconnaîtront plus."(13) While the combined use of these two subject pronouns is not particularly unusual in itself, here their already

somewhat ambiguous reference sets up further uncertainty as both give way within the passage to yet another undesigned pronoun, creating moments of chaos of identity. In the next sentence, for example, *on* and *nous* become *je*: "je dirai: je suis débile qu'est-ce que vous voulez faut pas me demander la lune." (13) Who is speaking here, and to whom, is unclear.

The following paragraph, again made up of shifting voices, reintroduces *on*, yet continues to intersperse *je* and poses questions to undesigned interlocuters, using both *tu* and *vous* forms. Then, shortly afterward, the narrator announces,

je suivrai l'esprit de Régina. Nous dormirons ensemble, enroulées dans le même couverture. Nous nous tiendrons chaud. On n'a pas de couverture. Boff. On a l'esprit. (14-15)

This shifting of pronouns, combined with the direct statement that the narrating *je* and the character Régina will be "under the covers" *together*, suggests that the two voices will meld as the novel continues to unfold. Further contributing to this suggestion, toward the end of the novel, when Régina orders loudly, "arrêtons!", the narrator interjects that "ça s'arrêta, car elle avait une voix *spéciale*." (my emphasis 222)

Throughout the novel, the speaking voice within the narrative drifts artfully, and at times even guilefully, among instances of direct and indirect speech utterances of the characters, narration of the diegesis, and the free indirect discourse of the characters' unvoiced thoughts. Often, the source of the flow of words is not noted in any explicit fashion. In a characteristic breakdown in unity of voice, the following passage depicts a dizzy moment of instability during which the character experiences a splitting of self as both subject and object. The constant shifting among the voices

in free indirect discourse represents the character's non-verbalized perceptions as they occur in his consciousness. The exchange, melding with instances of authorial or narratorial mediation, sets up tension among the voices and can be difficult for the reader to follow, as in the following passage of what appears to be mostly internal monologue.

Tournant en rond comme un fou comme un rat dans le labyrinthe, gémissant, cirant presque, Mann, au croisement de deux chemins balisés, des baguettes sous le bras, s'arrachait les cheveux, où est-elle? Je suis peut-être allé trop vite je l'ai dépassée il faut que je retourne en arrière que je sillonne tout le pays, je ne veux pas qu'ils la traquent comme un gibier! il faut que je la retrouve et comment tu espères la retrouver une aiguille dans une botte de foin, pas aiguille, diamant, je suis givré moi.

Mais il faut que je la sauve!

Tu es vraiment givré.

Il remonta vers le nord. Tourna vers l'ouest. Repartit vers l'est. Redescendit vers le sud en faisant des zigzags. S'assit sur une pierre moussue et se mit à pleurer. (203-204)

The reader too must make her/his way through what may seem, at times, like a labyrinth of words in the text. Because Rochefort frequently omits visual markers or tags that would indicate the entrance of a different voice into the narration, it is not immediately clear that *Tu es vraiment givré*, for example, is not the utterance of another character.

Also characteristic of the novels in this second group is intentional authorial distancing. Breaking the pattern of first-person, or autodiegetic, female narration used in her earlier novels, *Une Rose pour Morrison*, *Archaos ou le jardin étincelant*, and *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* proceed through the voice of a third-person, extradiegetic narrator. (In a fourth, *Printemps au parking*, the homodiegetic narrator is a young male.) Asked about what constituted "quality" writing, Rochefort once

commented, "I have a concept of what good writing is that has to do with the concept of distance. . . ." (*Shifting Scenes*, 183) She explained, "there was a period during which everyone had to expectorate their miseries, you know what I mean? And this literature of experience was abominable . . . not lacking in interest, if you will, but . . . when it's not art, then it's nothing. The effect is lost." (181) During this same interview, responding to queries about the progression of her own writing, she responded, "what happened after *Les Stances à Sophie*? I don't know anymore. In any case, from then on I did not write from personal experience." (178) She has noted in *C'est bizarre l'écriture*, in reference to *Une rose pour Morrison*, that: "je sortais du circuit – ENFIN!" (89) Emphatically denouncing the tendency to write autobiographically as a weakness, she continued, "le moi est détestable.. le moi, cette canaille, ce hâtif, ce bourbeux ce confus, le moi écrit comme un cochon, il écrit avec de la colle. . . ." (103)

Although Rochefort succeeded in stylistically distancing herself from her characters, she continued to live in a kind of symbiotic rapport with them, often marking their voices with traces that tend to give form to authorial perspective. As she states in *C'est bizarre l'écriture*, "il vient un moment où on se mélange complètement avec le livre, où on vit dedans, d'une vie souvent plus réelle que la vraie, et, ça ce n'est pas une blague, au point de la préférer, et d'être tenté de basculer dans une complaisante schizophrénie. C'est là une des joies de l'écriture." (125,6) As for speaking through the characters, Rochefort commented, "mes personnages et moi nous sommes maintenant bien ensemble. Pas confondus, je ne

suis pas dans leur peau ... nous sommes tout proches. Mes personnages sont des gens. Le rapport est d'altérité, tout simplement." (103)

In *C'est bizarre l'écriture*, Rochefort admits that her own voice continued to be notably present in the characters of her novels during this period. She states that, "des adolescents sautaient dans chacun de mes projets à l'époque, pleins d'intentions belliqueuses ... mes démons adolescents déferlèrent ... dans *Une Rose pour Morrison*." (31) She further notes that "le recul [du moi] n'est jamais complet, même tapé le papier écrit garde le reflet de Narcisse. ..." (37) It is perhaps because, as she admits "il y aurait entre mon inconscient (!) et mon écriture ... un trafic compliqué." (86) With regard to her *moi*, Rochefort confesses that, "en fin de compte il adore être un autre." (104) In *Printemps au parking*, for example, Rochefort allows Christophe to mask her voice. As she reveals, "comme Christophe ne disposait pas du vocabulaire adéquat, je lui dictai ma phrase ... et il la récita gentiment." (109)

In *Une Rose pour Morrison*, it is the voice of Sereine, ludicly referred to as a young university professor of "téléologie," whose intellectual speeches and sarcastic commentaries regularly punctuating the text are reminiscent of Rochefort's own derisive and rebellious voice. A primary target of Sereine's criticism is the tight control of French society under what is viewed as the manipulative, autocratic, and essentially unparliamentary government of the Gaullist regime. In a heteroglossic instance of humorous and generative language play, parodying perceived presidential pomposity, the voices of author, character and contemporary figure overlap. Sereine mockingly announces,

tout d'abord et prologalement ... le président se représide. Il n'y a en effet d'autre téléologie à l'exercice du pouvoir que l'exercice

du pouvoir. . . . Durant son nouveau mandatement, ayant renforcé dans le précédent ses pouvoirs légiférants, il fera anticonstitutionnellement des ordonnancements présidenstabilisatrices qui seront référendomisées auprès de la surpopulation hyperconditionalisée. (22)

Here her sarcasm is directed at De Gaulle's repeated attempts to hold onto political power through intimidation, mandates, public referendums, and tight control of the media through the Ministry of Information. Specifically, reference is made to a speech De Gaulle made just prior to the 1965 election in which he threateningly declared that without his leadership the French Republic would collapse into "une confusion de l'Etat plus désastreuse encore qu'elle ne connut autrefois." (*Discours et messages. Vers le terme*, 401) Sereine's language is characterized by a feigned seriousness, lofty phrasing, and formal syntax intended to mock the character's negative estimate of what she considers De Gaulle's own ponderous rhetorical style. Her language is replete with an abundance of mocking neologisms aimed at satirizing De Gaulle's political maneuvering as well as his penchant for grandiloquent oratory. It is also language that is self-generating and subversive, calling attention to itself as language.

The narrating voice further joins that of Sereine to deliver pointed criticism of De Gaulle, and other government figures, with regard to their manipulation of language. S/he refers to them as "verbologues" who deliberately attempt to sway popular opinion by masking reality through the invention and use of euphemisms.

Les Verbologues étaient très forts, ils avaient une longue pratique. Ils avaient inventé le Mot Espaces Verts pour supprimer les libertés, le Mot Stabilité pour se maintenir au pouvoir, le Mot Prospérité pour faire croire que c'était celle de tout le monde, le Mot Maternité Volontaire pour avoir des tas de lardons, le Mot Pays pour nier les citoyens, le Mot Monde Libre pour cogner sur le reste, le Mot Sous-

Développé pour faire croire qu'ils l'étaient et le Mot Bonheur pour endormir le désir. Et cetera. (217)

The words highlighted by ironic capitalization are all Gaullist terms associated with his special brand of propaganda. Another voice, that of Amok, also blends with that of the narrator. Amok "translates" dissimulative phrases, particularly those used to deflect attention from the horror of war, such as: "aider les gouvernements amis. Appliquer le Cessez-le-Feu. Défendre la Liberté" and "Protection de la Paix." (118) He continues: "nous avons établi la paix sur des forêts entières avec du napalm. . . . La paix s'étendait partout où nous passions, la paix éternelle." (119) Thus alerted to this sort of Orwellian "Newspeak", the reader is left to interpret other anesthetized terms for him/herself.

Further linguistic subversion takes place in the form of parody as the character Sénile, whose voice represents that of De Gaulle in Rochefort's novel, prepares for and practices one of his speeches. With regard to the notion of parody, Bakhtin clearly divides it into two different types: stylization (or what may also be referred to as allusion, quotation, or metafictional intertextuality), and ironized parody (which references and mocks previous texts). Both of these types rely upon double-voiced discourses, or the intersection of two voices with opposing points of view. Speech becomes a kind of battlefield for opposing intentions. For Bakhtin, then, parody of this type is implicitly transgressive and subversive. Its success, that is the ability of the listener or reader to discern and appreciate the mockery or argument being presented (to "get the joke"), depends on his awareness of the previous text at which the mockery is directed. In the manner of the *roman à clef*, the texts of De Gaulle's speeches, as well as his rhetorical style in general, are assumed to be

familiar to the implied reader of Rochefort's novel. The text can best be appreciated in terms of its context.

Rochefort related during an interview that she sometimes transcribed sections of De Gaulle's actual speeches directly into her text from radio emissions that aired as she worked on the novel. (Hurtin, 11) In fact, as she notes in her own *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, her novel *Une Rose pour Morrison* began as an automatic writing experiment in 1966. For twenty-four days, during which she wrote almost incessantly, news of the Vietnam War and the anti-war music of Bob Dylan (to whom the book is dedicated) provided an almost constant background. She relates:

je me consolais avec l'écriture automatique, en écoutant Dylan et en inventant des mots. Et qu'est-ce qui se passe? Voilà Norman Morrison qui se fait brûler devant le Pentagone, la guerre qui fait rage au Vietnam entre les mangoustes et les serpents najas, de Gaulle qui fait un discours dans le poste, ils viennent jusque dans mes bras, s'infiltrèrent dans mes phrases et en font autre chose, on ne peut jamais être tranquille même en vacances. (*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 269)

(Norman Morrison was a Quaker, an American who committed suicide by setting himself on fire on the steps of the Pentagon in 1965 as a gesture of protest against American involvement in the Vietnam War.)

In yet another instance of heteroglossic layering of voices, this time including those of the diegetic character, the implied author or narrator, and De Gaulle himself, Sénéle echoes some of the president's favorite phrases and images. He refers, for example, to France as a ship with himself at the helm: "nous avons pris la vitesse de croisière" and, he adds, "qui mieux qu'un capitaine peut diriger le bateau?"(91) He speaks of France before his tenure using words such as: *anarchie*, *tâtonnements*,



*erreurs*. France under his guidance, however, is described as "Maître de son Destin et sur la voie du Développement Intérieur et de l'Harmonie Extérieure Stable et Efficace engagé dans la Grande Oeuvre de Rénovation Permanente de la Prospérité, de l'Expansion du Progrès, de la Revalorisation du Travail, dans un élan Nouveau!"(91) His speech is characterized by the use of anaphoric pronouncements, rhetorical questions and exclamations of grandeur: "quelle anarchie . . . quelle méconnaissance . . . quels tâtonnements . . . quelles erreurs . . .," and "qui mieux . . . qui mieux . . . qui mieux. . ."(91) He vigorously exclaims intermittently: "des touches à tous! (sic)" "tout le monde y gagne!" and "c'est l'équilibre!"(92)

Rocheport's derision of this political figure disintegrates into absurdity in a later passage in which the actual broadcast of Sénile's speech is filtered through the voice of the narrator. In a totally self-centered address, the president appears on the screen of the *mégavision* to deliver his state-of-the-union remarks. Since he considers himself "the state" (much in the manner of Louis XIV's "l'Etat c'est moi"), the remarks all concern his personal physical condition.

Il allait bien merci. Ses peuples pouvaient être tranquilles, il leur restait. La semaine dernière il avait failli avoir un petit froid, il avait éternué le matin, mais il avait remis son fourré et ça s'était passé. Son bouton sur la joue avait aussi disparu. Ses selles étaient normales, hier peut-être un peu dures mais ce matin il était allé très bien, plutôt mou, d'une belle couleur marron. (94)

In Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, the essential nature of the popular voice is laughter. Laughter is essentially an interior form of truth. It resists praise, flattery and hypocrisy and serves to liberate from fear, fear of prohibitions, of the past, of the mysterious, of the sacred, and of power. One of the sources of the laughable is the body, particularly any ludicrous celebration of bodily functions. In

his analysis of Rabelais's work, Bakhtin explains that "the material bodily lower stratum is needed, for it gaily and simultaneously materializes and unburdens. It liberates objects from the snares of false seriousness, from illusions and sublimations inspired by fear."(*Rabelais and His World*, 376) "This lower stratum is mankind's real future," he adds. "At the same time the author mocks the pretenses of the isolated individual who wants to be perpetuated and who is ridiculous in his senility."(378)

As Bakhtin has pointed out, scatological references and expressions, intended as a means of besmirching, degrading, and debasing, probably can be found in every language. Excrement, Bakhtin asserts, "is the most suitable substance for the degrading of all that is exalted."(*Rabelais and His World*, 152) The French language, interestingly, has a particularly well developed lexicon in the area of excrement.<sup>8</sup> In the passage quoted above, the character Senile's self-absorbed fascination with his own fabrications, in this case his bowel movements, the scatological imagery works to accomplish several ends: to point to the general lack of important substance in the public pronouncements of the country's leader; to besmirch and demystify the power of both the office of president and the perceived pomposity of its incumbent; and to generate ironic laughter that would replace awe with a sense of empowerment. After Sénile finishes with an authoritative and fatherly, "je vous souhaite une bonne nuit"(94), the narrator cynically interjects, in a flat tone of voice, that the French people were not favorably responsive: "dans toute la ville, après le discours de Sénile, les gens se lavaient."(95) Not only have they not been seduced either by this rhetoric or by its egotistical locuteur, they are disgusted.

Uncertainty surrounding the voices in the novel is compounded by the confusion involving the characters' names. Names and naming, generally, function to define, delimit and identify characters, providing a stable and dependable reference for the reader. Rochefort, however, subverts that process by using the absence of names or variation in names to encode multiplicity, change, instability, freedom and spontaneity. Except for the teachers, Mademoiselle Bell and professor Tchouk, only the young people have names. School administrators are referred to with stylized names in capital letters, such as: *le Pouvoir*, *la Conseillère*, and *Amère*, *la Directrice*. They are "typed," seen as rigid categories or symbols of authority rather than individuals. Rochefort's choices of names for the children are always laden with unspoken commentary. One child, for example, answers to "Qui-ça." His name, an indefinite pronoun, suggests that he is regarded as insignificant by others (particularly by adult "others" who would have had the privilege of naming him that, or by condescending adult "others" who perhaps would not have even noticed him or bothered to learn his name). The pejorative use of *ça* in reference to a person reveals a condescending attitude on the part of the speaker who, by denying the person's name, positions him as an object and intentionally refuses to acknowledge that person's existence as a subject in his own right.

Reader disorientation can also result from shifting identities due to the fact that the names of the children vary. Generally, naming becomes a means of controlling or possessing. Again, however, Rochefort undermines this traditional intention, rendering her narrative richer and more complex in the proliferation of voices and, at the same time, making the reader's role more important as s/he is given

the opportunity to interpret the changes and to "see things differently." Already a numerous group, the children assume nicknames, label each other, role-play, try out new identities. There is, for example, "Julius, qui s'appelait Charles," "Steve qui s'appelait René," and "Janis qui s'appelait Colette"(116). Assuming roles in a fantasy, Grace becomes "ma chère confrère Grancianapoula" and Regina is referred to variously as "chère professeure Reginaldski"(90) or "professeure Reginakatiki."(91) Without any explanation, about halfway along their misadventure, the characters take on pseudonyms like: *Chat, Frédérico, Tulipe, Ours, Nounours* (129-154). Apparently, the children are used to being called by different names. In a scene near the end, Alice is called Prosperine by her own mother who is only irritated that Alice has been away without asking permission and without telling her mother where she was. The police had called her a number of other names, to which she had responded only because she was aware that they were talking to her. The narrator tries to explain:

C'était ça le truc qui avait pris en fin de compte, spontanément, appeler tout enfant en difficulté par le premier nom qui tombe sous la main. Ils pigeaient immédiatement.  
 --Bibi! Marthe! Eufraise! Arsène! Douille! Chrysalide! Toto!  
 N'importe quoi. (235)

Rochefort's narrative would seem to suggest, again, with all of this insistence and fluidity among names, a determined resistance to imposed identity. Her young characters sense the importance of the individual's power to create, or re-create, the self.

Just as Rochefort's novels demonstrate the mechanism of naming as a means to determine identity, they repeatedly point to the power of language to control

thought and impose ideology. This is cleverly brought out in Chapter IV of *Archaios ou le jardin étincelant* in imagery recalling the Biblical tower of Babel. The chapter begins, in fact, with the words: "d'une tour assez haute, Babel par exemple. . . ." (321) The narrator relates that neighboring kings were looking jealously at the freedom and prosperity enjoyed by the citizens of Archaios and, feeling threatened, were vigorously seeking ways to create scorn among their own people for the Archaios and their community. A major propaganda campaign is launched, through a barrage of rumors and pamphlets, to disseminate misinformation and to prejudice public opinion. As the narrator relates, "il y avait dans les palais des concours de venin, où le texte le plus chargé de poison se voyait payé de son poids d'or." (323) The principal theme of all of this invective, the narrator reveals, was the existence of widespread disorder and immorality in the neighboring kingdom.

Although the novel has a cast of more than eighty specifically named characters, it is anonymous voices, here representing the general public, that reveal the success of the campaign of rhetorical excess and half-truth (*vérité infléchie*) generated by these hired prevaricators. The source of all this rumor and misinformation is, of course, never revealed to the unwitting public. The mere fact that the claims had become so widespread and so frequently uttered and/or *printed* reinforced their popular acceptance. Following the propaganda campaign, a mocking comedy ensues as a series of undesignated individuals voice their newly formed opinions concerning conditions they now believe to exist in the neighboring kingdom. Their attitudes and opinions clearly demonstrate the success of this crusade of seductive rhetoric. In heteroglossic layering, these voices, one after

another, articulate as fact what those rumors, pamphlets, and works of art had alleged. The different accounts, in their anonymity, exaggeration, and distortions, demonstrate the power of language and art in the creation of myth as the imagined becomes the real. Fantasy, embellishment and aggrandizement characterize excerpts of their invective inspired by the persuasive discourse used in the propaganda campaign.

Les fous se hissent au pouvoir à la suite d'un concours public de performances sexuelles. . . . (324)

Les gens sensés sont enfermés dans des cages. . . . (324)

Les paysans envahirent la ville . . . et en déportèrent les avocats, les juges, les scribes, les docteurs, et autres clercs qu'ils attachèrent aux charrues. . . . (324)

Tous les enfants sont faits par le roi. . . . Les produits de cette copulation immonde sont évidemment tous des monstres orange et rouge à plusieurs têtes. . . . (325)

Le roi, constamment ivre . . . se livre à la magie. (325)

Ce pays n'est rien autre que la plate-forme du démon. . . . (326)

Ils accordent une importance extrême à leur anatomie, et en utilisent la partie médiane antérieure comme moyen transactionnel. . . . (327)  
Et personne ne travaille. Tous les habitants sont assis devant leur porte au soleil, fumant des tiges de canabe. . . . (327)

Livré au vice, à la décadence l'ivrognerie la veulerie l'abomination la décomposition sociale, ce peuple s'enfonce dans un océan de stupre, et disparaît de l'horizon civilisé. (328)

("Stupre," not a word in French, occurs here as another example of Rochefort's intentional misspellings and neologisms. It ironically reemphasizes the mindless stupidity of the people.) And on and on, it goes. The foolishly gullible people parrot

these lies and fail to observe or criticise their own kingdom and leader. "c'est un vieux truc," the narrator points out, "qui marche à tous les coups." (328)

The ultimate response to these negative voices is the distortion rendered by local historians. They record, for posterity, events and people *as the kings would have them remembered*. Historical speech is supposed to be anchored in fact, but, since the 1960s, scholars are aware that historians also emplot a slant to their narratives. Recalling the discourse of critics such as Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, Dominic LaCapra and Jean Luc Nancy, for example, Rochefort's narrative questions passive acceptance of traditional recorded history<sup>9</sup>. The voice of the narrator sarcastically interjects, "telle se dessina devant l'Histoire l'image d'Archaos, et resta seule accréditée, la vraie n'ayant pas été fixée, faute de parchemin." (328) Here, taking advantage of a form common to non-fictional texts, the implied author of Rochefort's novel uses the footnote as a forum to obliquely voice his/her attitude toward the notion of history in general and toward its imposed, arbitrary selectivity. The footnote reads drily, "ce qui n'a pas facilité nos recherches. (Les historiens.)." (328) An almost identical footnote also appears on page thirty-five of the novel, with reference to the ballads sung by Ezéchias, tutor to the king's son Govan. The ballads, relates the narrator, "sont malheureusement le seul témoignage écrit de la poésie archaote." (35) The footnote, here too, sneers, "cela n'a pas facilité nos recherches. (Les historiens.)." (35) Later on, this same footnote appears twice more, and on the same page. The first footnote references two separate narrative statements. One statement concerns the language of Archaos, that it is "bourrée de sens variables jusqu'à l'antinomie selon la circonstance, l'humeur, le temps qu'il

fait, la personne à qui on parle (espions par exemple). . . .”(331) The second footnote refers to the narrative remark that, “une opposition secrète revendiquant le Tout est Gratuit . . . fut écrasée avec sauvagerie, ainsi que des sectes diverses à tendances édénistes parousiques chiméristes et autres dépravations de l’âme, dont il ne resta plus trace dans l’Histoire.”(331) The repetition of the footnote on this same page refers to yet another intrusive narrative comment concerning history and its willed silence with regard to certain voices. In this comment, the narrator has posed the rhetorical question, “où finissaient-ils par arriver, ces parias dont l’Histoire perd alors la piste?”(331)

The novel ends poetically with a series of ambiguous utterances by a number of unidentified voices that speak of themselves alternately as a collective *nous* and as *moi*. The implied narratee is addressed both singularly as *tu* and plurally as *vous*. As Diana Holmes aptly noted,

Archaos has above all put an end to hierarchies, to rigid oppositions and divisions between categories of people as between the sexual and the spiritual, the real and the imaginary. It is appropriate therefore that the final words should be addressed by an undefined *Nous* (We) to an unnamed, ungendered – linguistically signified as both masculine and feminine – *tu/vous* (you): here theme and form are indistinguishable. (“Realism, fantasy and feminist meaning: the fiction of Christiane Rochefort”, 35)

The characters and narrator, however, are not the only vehicles that allow the author to impose his/her own voice. Another means is through the novel’s structure. Referring to *Printemps au parking*, Rochefort recalls that she divided the novel into chapters, each preceeded by a series of phrases ironically summarizing the content of the chapter. Chapter two, for example, begins with the following heading.



Le monde appartient à ceux qui se lèvent tôt, mais quel monde? \*  
 Habitudes et Imagination \* La navigation à voile \* Les Livres  
 n'enseignent pas de méthode pour devenir intelligent \* Comment  
 supprimer le biftek et faire aimer les ministres \* Les rêves ça se plante  
 comme des radis \* Qui vole un oeuf vole de ses propres ailes \* (33).

These remarks do at least reference the essence of the chapters that follow, but within the chapters themselves there are no divisions to indicate where one section would end and another begin. The overall diegesis proceeds largely in chronological fashion. Sequencing, however, is interrupted by frequent analepsis, dream, and *mise-en-abyme*. The frequent use of textual space to indicate temporal pause or, most often, to draw attention to unspoken significance is thwarted by the implied author/narrator when, near the end of the text s/he tires of the practice and announces blatantly to the implied reader.

Là il y eut un temps de pause. (175)

Pause, bis. (176)

Pause, ter. Maintenant je n'indiquerai plus, vous n'avez qu'à mettre les blancs où il faut. (176)

The solitary voice of the first-person narrator in the opening pages, who declares in the first sentence that "ils me font tous chier"(15), joins, on the last pages of the novel, the voices of a group of youthful agitators who shout their defiance in unison from the rooftop.

\_\_ Si on sautait? dit Fabrice, au bord du toit. C'est si beau. Justement que je suis presque heureux.

\_\_ Justement que t'es presque heureux, saute pas dit Thomas, tu peux commencer à vraiment les faire chier.

\_\_ Voilà exactement pourquoi il faut vivre, dit Zélie. Il n'y a pas d'autre vraie raison.

\_\_ Merde, dit Nicolas, mais c'est le printemps!

\_\_ Merde dit tout le monde, c'est le printemps, merde, merde, merde! et tous en haut du toit on s'est mis à crier, comme des fous. (230)

Effectively, they have reversed the situation from "ils me font chier" to "les faire chier." They have found a new sense of empowerment through their group's solidarity. In reference to textual structure as a frame for her own voice, Rochefort comments in *C'est bizarre l'écriture* that,

peut-être que j'en avais assez du champ limité de Christophe et j'ai sauté dehors. Ou je ne me trouvais pas assez présent dans le livre (l'auteur! l'auteur!). Il y a une sorte de fil du rasoir, qui est la place de l'auteur dans son livre: une fois le moi éliminé il faut revenir comme écrivain, par une autre porte. . . . (177)

Structure can function as an outlet for the writer's voice, an expression of attitude about the way novels (or life) should or should not be ordered. Through its unconventional, seemingly spontaneous organization into a labyrinth of eclectic content, always presented with mocking humor, Rochefort's autobiographical work *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, for example, physically and philosophically "speaks" Rochefort's language. Rochefort was well aware of the ambiguities surrounding the status of the subject, as is apparent in the play of first and third person pronouns in the title of her book. The book was an experiment. In it, Rochefort edits, or re-invents her own taped voice. "Il faut réinventer. L'écrire, bref. L'information directe, ça ne va pas," she insists in *C'est bizarre l'écriture*(50). She also commented that, "le sens n'est pas dans le mot il est dans l'organisation."(69)

Both *C'est bizarre l'écriture* and her autobiography *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur* are works that aim to demystify. She uses the genre of autobiography to point out, indirectly, the concoctions of lies and half-truths we tell ourselves about our selves, about life, and about literature. She points out the processes, artifices and limits imposed on our perceptions/conceptions of all of those. The act of writing,

according to Rochefort, is, even with conscious effort, only partially free of the powerful influence of convention. She insisted that,

le stylo . . . recrache avec adjonction de résidus culturels, en grec ou pas, déposés dans les réservoirs, et selon un ordre lui aussi manufacturé. . . 'bien écrit', le 'beau style' . . . c'est l'image culturelle du système en vigueur, et par laquelle il se perpétue quel que soit le 'contenu' du moule. (133)

It is precisely that "système en vigueur" that Rochefort's texts consistently tend to challenge. Her autobiography deliberately blurs the boundaries between herself and the world. Into the conglomeration making up the text are musings, facts, personal arguments and criticisms, excerpts of correspondence, fables, poems, word games, mock interviews, recipes, numerous intertextual instances such as lists of remembrances (in imitation of Georges Perec's "Je me souviens. . ."), and metatextual commentary on the writing of others, advice to would-be writers, and so on.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, although metatextual elements are present throughout Rochefort's fiction, her novels of this second period begin to evidence a growing reflexivity. Increasingly, as the act of narrating is brought to the attention of the reader, s/he is reminded of the power and play of narrative. In this group, the novel having the strongest metatextual voice is *Printemps au parking*. Hutton astutely notes that the homodiegetic narrator, Christophe, "defines himself and his life in terms of mass-media culture which he professes to despise, no longer telling his tale, but told by it." (*The Novels of Christiane Rochefort*, 89) Admitting that he is, for the most part, making up his life as he goes by telling himself stories, he confesses, "la vie. Je me raconte des histoires." (147) He repeatedly compares his

life and situation to film with references such as: "et merde je me sentais redevenu adulte et contemporain et même en train de jouer dans un film." (23) He sees his story first as "juste une rêverie en l'air . . . dans mon cinéma." (53) The stories he tells first become clear in his mind, "nette comme un film." (170) Life, as Christophe understands it: "c'est une longue, longue, longue histoire." (*Printemps au parking*, 191) Thomas, Christophe's scholarly friend and figure of the writer, observes that in the art of story-telling Christophe excels: "ainsi tu devenais un héros comme dans les livres, et voilà une histoire d'un plus haut niveau dramatique, et plus facile à digérer car cathartique, conjuratoire, transgressive et expiatoire. . . ." (199) These carnivalesque traits were also important to Rochefort as writer and storyteller. They define, in large measure, her novelistic fiction. As Rochefort must have sensed, and as Hutton has correctly pointed out,

what the text does not spell out, but what the reader can perceive, is that stories are linked to society's desire to label and control the individual. . . . Christophe's role as storyteller . . . is a complex one: he spins tales to others, yet is himself a victim (at least initially) of society's more pervasive master-narratives. (91)

The development of self-reflexive narrative, as the next chapter will demonstrate, becomes increasingly notable in Rochefort's last five texts as the novelist approaches the end of her life and her writing career. As the narrating voice returns again to its earlier penchant for first person expression, a preoccupation with death and a lingering concern with issues of identity thematically combine with interest in the act of writing as an extension of self. As analysis will discover, however, the dialogic and the carnivalesque remain intrinsic to Rochefortian fiction.

## NOTES

1. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, in their *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, suggest that Bakhtin's comments regarding utopia may have political implications referencing the Russian society of his day. They write: "Because Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology is itself a form of utopian thought, which officially acknowledged the entire tradition of utopian thinking as its predecessor, Bakhtin's comments would appear to constitute a critique of some aspect of Soviet ideology. The precise implication of this critique remain unclear, however, and it seems more prudent to stress the general anti-utopianism of the chronotope essay than to recommend a specific political reading." (398)

2. In their book *French Cultural Studies: an Introduction*, Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly include a photograph of a popular actor of the 1970s, Michel Colucchi, known to the French as Coluche. Coluche made his reputation with one-man shows and a television series built around neo-Poujadist monologues "which became celebrated as expressions of the feelings of the ordinary French bloke, "le mec," a man who was worried about his job and his wife, and who thought France was being overrun by foreigners." (249)

3. In this 188-page, controversial "essay," Rochefort vigorously argues for the right of children. In it, she describes children as an oppressed class that has not been allowed a voice in society. She describes children as victims of capitalist consumerism and hierarchical social structure that profit from their docile passivity and helpless dependence. She contends that families, as well as medical, psychiatric, educational and legal institutions all devise and employ mechanisms of control and oppression in their relationships with children, for their own benefit. She advocates that adults stop defining children as "des humains inachevés mentalement et physiquement." (48) Rather, she insists, they are "solides, héroïques, (voir à quoi ils résistent!), adroit, capable, graves, profonds, leur intelligence est vaste et délicate, ils sont subtils et malins, ils savent se débrouiller. . . ." (49) It is this image of children that her fictional *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* attempts to represent.

In a characteristic play on words, Rochefort's bibliography for this book is captioned by the phrase *Des livres pour les enfants*. Among her reference sources she lists: David Cooper, *Mort de la famille*; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*; John Holt, *Escape from childhood*; Ivan Illich, *Une Société sans école*; R. D. Laing, *La Politique de la famille*; Fréderick Leboyer, *Pour une naissance sans violence*; Gérard Mendel, *Pour décoloniser l'enfant*; and Wilhelm Reich, *La Révolution sexuelle*.

4. In her book *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, Kristin Ross states, "the French social sciences we are familiar with now were thus a postwar invention, and like all aspects of French modernization after the war, their ascendancy bore some relation to U.S. economic intervention. To a certain extent, the turn to this kind of study was funded and facilitated by the

United States in a kind of Marshall Plan for intellectuals. . . . By expanding the social sciences in Europe, Americans sought to contain the progress of Marxism in the world; a science of empirical and quantitative sociology--the study of repetition--was erected against the science of history, the study of the event." (186-7) Ross specifically lists financing granted from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation to establish the *École pratique des hautes études*, the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*.

5. George Perec in *Les choses*, for example, portrays the focus on things, materialism, that is duplicated in his run-on style of *entassement* or accumulation.

6. Rochefort's interest in and empathy for children and minors, whom she saw as basically voiceless in society and consequently misunderstood and mistreated, is evidenced by their presence and importance in the novels of this period. All of these novels were published between 1966 and 1975 (except her autobiographical experiment, *Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 1978). These years correspond with the student rebellion of 1968 and the attempted reforms in the interest of children and students that were to receive attention in the years following. Her sympathies, fictionally supported in this book as well as in *Encore heureux qu'on va vers l'été* and in *Printemps au parking*, were soon given a more direct forum. In 1976, Rochefort's lengthy argument for the rights of children and minors was published as the non-fictional *Les Enfants d'abord*.

7. The original proverbs to which this exchange refers are: "on ne fait pas d'omelette sans casser les oeufs;" "il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu;" "il faut battre le fer quand il est chaud;" "un bon tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras;" "à bon chat bon rat." The pronouncement that "qui chasse deux lièvres a la foi" contains a play on words with the expression *a la foi*, which can be interpreted orally as either *a la foi* (has faith) or as *à la fois* (at the same time). Thus, again, Rochefort would seem to be pointing to the breakdown in communication that results from ambiguities inherent in language.

8. Forms of the word *merde* in French include nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs and occur in standard speech as well as in slang expressions and oaths. Some common, and colorful, uses of the word include: *merder* (in the obvious sense as well as in the slang expressions, for example, *merder son examen* or *l'affaire a merdé*), *emmerder*, *s'emmerder*, *merdoyer*, *se démerder*, *foutre de la merde*, *merdeux(se)*, *merdique*, *emmerdement*, *merdier*, *des mouches à merde* (very large flies), and *merde!* (as an expression of good luck). It also occurs in numerous expressions such as: *avoir de la merde dans les yeux*, *un temps de merde*, *semer de la merde*, *il ne se prend pas pour de la merde*. The importance of the word in the French language is underscored by the existence of two separate words for the concept: *merder* and *chier*. *Chier*, too, has a long list of colorful variants. Verb forms include: *faire chier quelqu'un*, *se chier*, and *en chier*. Some noun forms are: *chieur(se)*, *chierie* (as in "Quelle chierie!"), *chiotte* (as an irritation or as another word for toilet), and *chiée* (as in "il a une chiée d'amies"). It is also used in expressions such as: *ça me fait chier* (that bores me), *chier dans son froc*, *y a pas à chier* (that's inevitable), *ça va chier* (it's going to

fail), *ça chie pas* (that's not important), and *ce film est à chier* (that film is terrible). The French have been and continue to be quite creative in the use of these expressions.

9. Notably Paul Ricoeur's three volume *Temps et récit*, Hayden White's *Metahistory*, and Jean Luc Nancy's *The Birth to Presence* (particularly the essay in this book entitled "Finite History"). The focus of the thought by these scholars is that history is emplotted narrative, necessarily requiring a point of view. They point out that historical narratives are, in fact, not objective, but constructed.

## CHAPTER 5 ROCHEFORT'S MATURE FICTION

"Mon inconscient doit le savoir, lui. Elle. Mon inconsciente.  
Et je lui fais une sacrée confiance. Elle est ce que je suis."

Christiane Rochefort

(*Ma vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 268)

Rochefort's third and final group of fictional narratives, as outlined earlier in this study, includes: *Quand tu vas chez les femmes* (1982), *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux* (1984), *La Porte du fond* (1988), *Conversations sans paroles* (1997), and *Adieu Andromède* (1997). These later works evidence a return to first-person perspective and concern for the plight of the individual, in particular, issues of self and identity. Not surprising in the work of a mature writer, a preoccupation with death and an increased focus on the act of writing as an extension of self contribute not only new themes but a sense of immediacy and intimacy. In addition, the tensions of polyphonic interplay in these texts lure readers into confrontation with language that examines preconceptions, values and beliefs, and toward a consciousness of "truths" and a consciousness of self, both the narrator's and his/her own.

These later novels tend to showcase language as they seek to rewrite and problematize history, self, story and gender. The illusion of truth created through mimetic tradition is rendered suspect as the lines between fantasy and physical reality become blurred. Their self-conscious writing tends to conflate story, history



and metatextual comment as the narrative slides between fact and fiction, between true and false memories, between conscious and unconscious voices. With this penchant for fantasy and the imagined, language and form also incline toward the poetic.

Rochefort's last group of fictional narratives can also be associated with what Philippe Lejeune has referred to as "l'âge de l'autobiographie." ("Nouveau Roman et retour à l'autobiographie" *L'Auteur et le manuscrit*, 51) Whatever the reasons, the last fifty years has produced a notable proliferation of first-person narratives, autobiographies, autobiographical novels<sup>1</sup>, and what has been referred to by Serge Doubrovsky as "autofiction."

L'autofiction, c'est la fiction que j'ai décidé, en tant qu'écrivain, de me donner de moi-même et par moi-même, en y incorporant, au sens plein du terme, l'expérience de l'analyse, non point seulement dans la thématique mais dans la production du texte.  
("Autobiographie/Vérité/Psychanalyse", 96)

In this new autobiographical "space," the subconscious or inner workings of the mind and the linguistic exploration of the unspoken and the imagined take precedence over history or story in assigning "meaning" to the text. The text then, in essence, creates fictions of a self. Raylene Ramsay, in her book *The French New Autobiographies* (1996), comments that the most distinctive feature of this new genre is "a telescoping of personal story and history and a reversible movement between inside and outside that is 'complementary.'" (48) She contends that,

This is art, seeking not Truth but truths and aware of the impossible nature of its enterprise. It is the act of the (im)possible moving between life and language, and toward a new autobiography (self/body/writing) out of (but not erasing) the old. (47)

For Ramsey the blended approach to writing the self becomes an emotional tightrope between the concept of a single Cartesian subject ("I think therefore I am") and an endlessly elusive identity deferred through slippages of language, caught between "the 'wild territories' of the unsayable (the presymbolic) and the (symbolic) linguistic order that constitutes the social self." (54)<sup>2</sup>

Rochefort's last group of novels/texts can be read as her own version of autofiction. They seem to adhere to the notion put forth by Sidonie Smith that,

the *autos*, shattered by the influence of the unconscious and structured by linguistic configurations beyond any single mind, may be nothing more, and certainly nothing less, than a convention of time and space where symbolic systems, existing as infinite yet always structured possibility, speak themselves in the utterance of a *parole*. (*A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 5)

The autobiographical text then becomes "a narrative artifice." (5) In these post-modern versions of first-person narratives, in which notions of authoritative speaker, intentionality, truth, meaning and generic integrity are rejected, tension is created "between poetics and historiography." (7) With an increased concern for the "graphia" or writing, these intimate narratives seem more intent on creating fictions of "the" self, however, rather than of "a" self. That is to say, these narratives are concerned more about the ways identities of the self are constructed than the construction of specific identity. The multiple voices and fictional characters in Rochefort's novels, while at times bearing resemblance to the voice, personality and life of the author herself, implicitly function rather as illustration that each "self" exists as multiplicities, or other selves. An overarching theme in each of Rochefort's last group of novels is a desire for totality in the inherently divided and conflicted human being. They are studies in the workings of the unconscious, as each

different narrator struggles with the voices within and without in an effort to cope with and understand his/her existence.

One of the figures in many of Rochefort's novels, and in her autofiction, has been a recurrent theme in literature in general, that of the double. Appearing in various guises, doubles put into relief the complexity of the personality at the interior of the character and add dimension to the narrative. Just as time can be transformed in narrative to permit reflection of the past within the present or a vision of the future in the present (or past), doubles allow similar expansion of character. Doubles permit the writer to describe the duality between body and spirit, between the sacred and the profane. They are a means for an individual to look within, in a quest for identity and personal subjectivity. They can function as an escape, a kind of exoticism or fantasy, or as an expression of another reality, a blending of dream or vision and more immediate physical circumstances. They can even serve as a doubling of the author, a sort of shadow of an interior "muse" to whom s/he addresses questions. As in Rimbaud's famous "je est un autre," the "I" becomes that "other" in order to become spectator of his own thought.

Doubling can be understood as a form of reversal, of complementary opposites; it too functions within the logic of carnival as Bakhtin explains it:

all the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (à l'envers), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. (*Rabelais and His World*, 11)

Doubling then, and carnival, embody relations and are a means for displaying otherness.

Further linking the two, doubles and carnival, is the notion of theatricality or spectacle. As Bakhtin notes, "because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle." (7) Doubles permit display or exhibition of self as other, often revealing an aspect of self that may otherwise be unrecognized or unacknowledged. Use of the device functions as a kind of unmasking that can permit a sense of unity or totality by identifying an aspect of the self that had not previously been recognized. Bakhtin explains that,

we are constantly and intently on the watch for reflections of our own life on the plane of other people's consciousness, and moreover, not just reflections of particular moments of our life, but even reflections of the whole of it. . . . If, however, these reflections do gain body in our life, as sometimes happens, . . . they may condense to the point where they deliver up to us a double of ourselves out of the night of our life ("Author and Hero in Aesthetic activity," *Art and Answerability*, 16)

The double, based on difference, is by nature duplicitous, dialogic, and relative. The figure can take on many different forms. It may be evidenced by variations in a character's name through the addition of suffixes that would suggest the diminutive, the feminine, the precious or the grotesque. It may be assumed behind a mask or other costume. Doubling may also be represented symbolically by an animal, a mythical figure such as an angel, or a simple mirror image. Doubles can also function as concrete representation of abstraction: wishes, fears, thoughts, or associations. Often associated with theater, the double, like theatrical representation,

takes the form of spectacle. It presents illusion as reality, like the magic mirror of the stage or film.

Doubles may exist in opposing relationships such as brother/sister, mother/daughter, father/son, husband/wife, master/slave. Sometimes these opposing relationships assume the form of androgynous couple. Tied to the desire for totality, the fusion of opposites in this divided couple would aspire toward the creation of a more original or ideal sexuality in which each sex would complement the other.<sup>3</sup> The image of androgynous double also connects the desire for totality with that of impossibility or infinity because it represents a quest for an elusive state to which an individual aspires but can never achieve.

This chapter focuses on two particular aspects of Rochefort's final group of novels: first, the novels as examples of the hybrid form of autofiction; and second, to the double as a mechanism for exploration of issues of selfhood and identity in these first-person narratives. In addition, the novels are read as examples of "carnivalized writing" that is, as expressed by Simon Dentith,

writing which has taken the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper. (65)

As autofiction, these novels refuse the parameters defining either novel or autobiography, demonstrating instead an original blend of new and traditional forms in the creation of a personal fictional voice. They enter the realm of carnival by this spirit of "uncrowning" or refusal of authority set by existing norms of genre.

Because attention has already been given elsewhere to Rochefort's novel *La Porte du fond*<sup>4</sup>, treatment of this novel is limited. Discussion of *Quand tu vas*

*chez les femmes*, a pivotal work in which Rochefort's fiction makes a leap into metaphorical representation of reality, phantasmagoria and figurations of the unconscious, precedes that of the last three texts on which little, if anything, has been written or published: *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, *Conversations sans paroles*, and *Adieu Andromède*<sup>5</sup>.

*Quand tu vas chez les femmes* is a novel that can be read as an "acting out" of the narrator's desires and fantasies. In it, Rochefort recreates an imaginative, dream-like world of reversals where no one and nothing are what they seem. As if in a hall of mirrors, full of illusions, distortions, and contortions, the characters often seem exaggerated versions of themselves. They are participants in sado-masochistic games, in a world where reason and restraint give way to perversion, fetishism, excess and dissimulation. The narrator's remark that, "la question c'est les limites et moi je n'en ai pas"(35) applies not only to him, but to the narrative itself. In general, the novel refuses markers that would delimit time, voice, and structure or separate performance from illusion. Among the puns that playfully abound throughout the text, the narrator's statement that, "l'interdit, voilà mon territoire"(47) is relevant to both his perversely neurotic behavior and to what is going on and being said (*dit*) on the inside, or at the (inter)ior of his subconscious, the territory of the narrative action.

Thematically, the narrative is directed at displaying and dispelling myths of identity constructed within the human psyche. In particular, myths attached to gender identities and the roles humans play as a result of these constructions. The female characters take shape as embodiments of the many, long-standing fears and misconceptions that some males have harbored with regard to women. Referring to

the explanation of this phenomenon in "The Uncanny," Freud states that "neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female organs. This *unheimlich* place. . . ." (245)<sup>6</sup> Women, it seems are ambivalent in the minds of some men; their womb represents the original home or *heim* and is therefore associated with familiarity, comfort and pleasure, yet it is hidden, mysterious, and therefore also representative of danger. Freud goes on to say that, "the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimlich*, familiar; the prefix 'un' is the token of repression." (245) The narrator of *Quand tu vas chez les femmes* conjures up visions of these mythically ambivalent women, struggles to cope with his perceptions, and in the end laughs derisively at the existence of the whole, absurd situation that has caused him to experience feelings of self hate and to endure tormented relationships with members of the opposite sex.

The narrating voice in *Quand tu vas chez les femmes* belongs to Bertrand, a male psychoanalyst and writer, as well as masochistic exhibitionist, whose story here takes on the tone of intimate journal, a literary form often associated with women. He struggles to relate the disjointed and conflicted existence of his double life, (the conventional aspect of his public life as psychoanalyst versus the unconventional and private world of his sexual fantasies), in what he refers to as, "mon livre . . . tournant décidément au journal intime (très) -- qu'ai-je désormais, à perdre? En vérité au point où je suis je devrais dire: au testament. Que vous avez présentement sous les yeux." (181)

The narrative opens with a heteroglossic allusion to Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre" as Bertrand reminisces:

Aux deux tiers du chemin de la vie, à peu près, je ne me sentis plus tiré par les haleurs.

— On ne hale plus, énoncèrent-ils dans leur langue. Vous n'avez qu'à vous haler vous-mêmes. (7)

Rocheftort's characteristic "ils" (a pronoun she uses without any specific reference, like the vague English usage of "they" which would point to unidentified and/or imagined power structures) is still present, giving out orders, and "dans leur langue," one that seems flawed with misrepresentation and misunderstanding. The narrator recalls that pronouncement, and concedes that, in fact, at a certain juncture in life, he finally did set out to "se haler" or "row his own boat" on what was left of the voyage of his life. He would not be towed along by others: "donc, nous nous dérivâmes. . . . (8)

The *nous* here is a significant shift from the *je* of the opening sentence. As the narrative unfolds, and the doubling begins, the narrator's self is indeed laid open as diverse. In addition, the statement could be read as an instance of double-voicing, that is an autobiographical blending of Rocheftort's own life experience and attitude with that of the narrator. She, too, set herself apart from society and decided to live by her own rules. Again, like the narrator, Rocheftort once expressed a penchant for "la vie à la dérive." She commented that, "mon rêve littéraire c'est la dérive totale. C'est là qu'on est vraiment branché." (*Ma Vie revue et corrigée par l'auteur*, 268)

From that abstract memory, Bertrand moves abruptly to a more physical one, "je me retrouvai une fois de plus rue Saint-Denis"(8). And thus begins a weird tale of sado-masochistic relationships which, at tale's end, turns out to have been a concoction, a *cocktail littéraire*,<sup>7</sup> representing the fantastical workings of the narrator's subconscious as he struggles to "see" and understand himself, and particularly his relationship with women, through scenes drawn from both memory



and imagination. Typical of a dream-like experience, the tale moves between memories and the flights of imagination they inspire. The adventure of sado-masochistic sex ends when, near the end of the novel, the narrator again finds himself at the same spot, "je me dirigeais vers la rue Saint-Denis." (174) In an ironic rereading, reversing the redemptive moment of happiness that involuntary memory recaptures through episodes of the *madeleine* and paving stone, in Proust, Rochefort's narrator attempts to erase and leave forgotten fearful and unpleasant memories:

Refaisant l'itinéraire de mon bonheur perdu, mes pas dans mes pas.  
Une petite madeleine sous chaque pavé. Ici, j'ai laissé mon offrande,  
les pluies l'ont effacée. (174)

Bertrand makes it clear that, as he has walked the streets of Paris, he has mentally worked through deep-seated fears and subconscious fantasies. Through this imaginative fantasy, he has finally come to understand himself and to derisively reject previous misconceptions regarding women and his relationship to them. This time, when he "goes to see the women," it is because he seeks and expects love.

--Tu n'en as pas encore assez pris? dit Macha, voyant mon  
état, qu'est-ce que tu veux donc encore?  
--De l'amour.  
--Ça tombe bien, j'en vends. (174)

At this point, the narrative jumps abruptly back to Bertrand's life as psychoanalyst. Having just worked through the entire, painful fantasy in his head as he walked along the streets of Paris, he now goes back to his office. Late for work, he washes off his face, and takes a dose of aspirin to try and chase away a terrible headache, "je souffrais d'une atroce migraine--visiblement à peine extrait d'une vie

personnelle."(175) He is indeed weary, and tired of the book he is trying to write as well.

Ne parlons pas de la vie qu'on appelle normale: il faut tout de même se montrer, paraît-il. Ni de mon livre, qui n'avance pas vite, j'aimerais pourtant qu'il soit fini avant moi. Je sens bien que je faiblis. . . mes forces me quittent. Le mal voluptueux qui va m'emporter me ronge, mon corps révolté ne tardera plus à me lâcher et je connaîtrai la paix enfin. ô Seigneur. (176-177)

The series of doubles that Bertrand encounters through the course of his lived and fantastical experiences in the novel is closely linked to his doctoral thesis, *Un Oedipe dans une société matriarcale* (59), inserted into the novel as *mise-en-abyme*. The thesis was inspired by the sadistic fantasies of a female patient. Bertrand, too, suffers miserably among women, "moi négligé répandu dans ma sanie, je jouis de la jouissance noire et très ancienne de n'être rien dans un monde de femmes affairées. . ." (15) The combination of the device of *mise-en-abyme* and the particular naming of the main character in Rochefort's novel is an instance of intertextuality or dialogue with André Gide's *Les Faux monnayeurs*. In Gide's novel, the principal character, similarly named Bernard is writing a book called *Les Faux monnayeurs*. Both novels deal with construction of reality.

Early on Bertrand experiences an identity crisis and expresses desire for his own death:

Je suis ailleurs. Je ne vois plus rien, devant mes yeux tout est rouge sombre, je suis empli de rouge sombre, empli de ma mort et n'est-ce pas ce que je cherche si douloureusement, l'âpre mort depuis toujours promise. Je vais l'avoir à la fin. (12)

He imagines his death as, "un maso trouvé mort dans un hôtel de passe. Non identifié. Sans identité, sans identité." (13)

Rocheport's narrative recalls Jung's explanation of the phenomenon of the double as archetype of the shadow<sup>8</sup>. As the narrator's thoughts turn to death, his first Biblical double emerges as a Christ figure:

Je pleure, je me mets à pleurer. Maman. Warum hast du mir verlassen. Mais, c'est fini maintenant Mère chérie, nous allons nous retrouver tous les deux. Aux enfers. (13)

The roles here are reversed. The role of God belongs to a woman. It is not God the father, but God the mother. In the reenactment of the crucifixion, God and the Christ figure will meet, not in heaven, but in Hell.

In another form of doubling, this suffering Christ figure appears in the form of a dog. Collared and leashed, with a whip inserted in his rear as a tail, Bernard walks on all fours down a public street,

je marchais mon châtiment, je portais ma croix où il fallait et dans la rue Saint-Denis. Vers le Golgotha des Lombards, avec mes deux larronnes, parmi la foule des incroyants.(29)

The "tail" effectively becomes the "tale" that the narrator tells, as well as the tale or story that those who observe him invent about him in their own minds. Macha, one of the prostitutes that he has gone to visit, puts the whip in, humiliates and degrades him, and orders him to behave like a dog. (Macha, her name a shortened form of *machoire*, a menacing allusion to powerful biting or crushing, and a figure of a castrating woman, is also doubled in a reference by the narrator to her as "l'énorme serpent.") (11). She beats him repeatedly with the whip before inserting it and tells him, "tu sais que des choses comme toi ça ne devrait pas exister?" (11) She is a symbol of death as she threatens his very existence.

Other Biblical figures also emerge as doubles. The narrator sees his evil self in Satan, for example:

Je le savais! Satan avait sommeillé en moi jusqu'à cet instant, Il s'éveillait, Il se manifestait enfin dans la Réalité, s'incarnait, et c'était moi. Moi! O hypostase, moi, tel que je suis dès avant ma naissance. J'avais trouvé mon visage originel, j'eus un éblouissement -- le sartori? (31)

The spectacle of his costume and dog-like behavior on a public street silences the crowd and causes the people to stand aside and stare. Their behavior permits the narrator to think of himself as powerful, controlling their reactions. Yet another double comes to his mind, the figure of Moses parting the waters: "Je fais le partage du silence, tel Moïse celui des eaux. Orgueilleuse puissance, payée du sacrifice de ma dignité, l'exaltant paradoxe." (37)

It is always in his role of dog that the narrator becomes an exhibitionist, a spectacle. The spectacle is a means of increasing his degradation. He relates, "Je me livre à une véritable danse du cul sous leur nez, réclamant leur attention -- j'ai tous les droits, par-dessus tout celui d'aller jusqu'au bout de mon ridicule, de mon horreur de moi." (16) He confesses to being an exhibitionist and to having "le vague rêve jadis caressé de passer devant les caméras." (44) Again on a public sidewalk, on all fours and licking the boots of the woman he refers to as "l'Ange Exterminateur<sup>o</sup>," he relates,

Je m'y traînai comme au pèlerinage, après elle. Nous avions à présent un modeste public de trois personnes -- ils nous prenaient pour un théâtre! les niais. Si bien piégés dans le spectacle qu'inaptes désormais à en distinguer la Réalité nue sous leur nez. . . . Notre public se demandait sans doute quel était le sujet de la pièce. (75)

When Macha orders him to expose himself, he gladly complies, "J'étais le manteau, et je me déployai devant la foule dans ma splendeur (j'avais bien sûr remis le pantalon décousu) et . . . j'étais la risée générale, j'étais au comble. . . ." (79) Often the spectacle is purely in his mind, a kind of interior movie in which he is the star performer: "je me passai et me repassai le film qui se déroulait là-haut, et dont j'étais l'inventeur." (92)

Other important doubles are female figures: Bertrand's estranged wife Malaure, the sadistic prostitute Macha, the fantastical figure of l'Ange Exterminateur (also referred to as Petra), and the beautiful and gentle Edwine. Their names are significant. Malaure, for example, euphonicly suggests the French *malheur* as well as *mal "aura"*, or even *ma "aura"* (my double); Petra refers to the power of the Medusa to turn men into stone. Both are castrating figures. All of their relationships with the narrator are sexual, and, most often, his role is one of subservience. The women are masterful; he is their slave.

Although the narrator's relationship with Malaure is somewhat more nurturing, it is grounded in deception,

Malaure et moi, . . . ne nous accolons pas dans le monde, préférant garder les mains libres. Certaines de nos relations ignorent même que nous nous connaissons. J'aime ces jeux, qui obligent à garder un contrôle parfait des niveaux de mensonge. (49)

They understand one another, "elle seule, je crois, connaît ma misère." (56) She was the patient with sado-masochistic fantasies that inspired his thesis "Oedipus in a matriarchal society." (Interestingly, one reason she agreed to marry Bertrand was to abandon her maiden name, Mlle de Rothen, which she also did not wish to pass on to their child, Simone. Pronounced aloud, it bears euphonic resemblance to the English

"rotten.") The narrator's relationship with their daughter is a source of further degradation. Bertrand confesses, "c'est un échec, cette petite me hait aujourd'hui. Elle est lesbienne de la façon la plus outrancière, militante, antimâle extrémiste, ainsi qu'anti-freudienne de choc." (64) For the most part Malaure is elusive. Bertrand relates that, "en aucun cas elle ne ferait interférence dans mes affaires de coeur si je ne l'y invite." (51) Importantly, however, Bertrand fantasizes about Malaure, "quand elle n'était pas là, je la fantasmais." (105) She is like his inspiration, his muse, but a muse that torments him.

Both the figures of Edwinc and *l'Ange Exterminateur* are pure fantasy.

*L'Ange* first appears to Bertrand in the women's restroom of a local bar. He is there, contemplating himself in the mirror while he masturbates, "dans les toilettes d'un bistrot je me suis vu dans la glace, et je me suis mis à me branler, branler comme un dingue. . . . (19), when a young woman comes in and sees him.

Un instant elle m'a regardé, comme figée, muette, les yeux fixes je la voyais dans le miroir. Une très jeune femme, une jeune fille. . . elle était belle comme l'Ange Exterminateur dont à l'instant l'image me féconda. . . . (19-20)

This figure, also referred to as Pétra, comes back repeatedly throughout the course of the narrative, wearing black boots and armed with a camera. She is constantly taking pictures of Bertrand in various postures, and making notes in a little journal. These pictures will be on display on the refrigerator door at the end of the novel, further revealing to Bertrand's own gaze his multiple selves. They will provide a final, summarizing spectacle. Here, although not cast in stone, Bertrand's image becomes fixed, stone-like, through the magic of Petra's camera eye. It is not accidental that

they are seen appropriately "affixed," as though stone cold, to the door of the refrigerator.

Edwine appears to Bertrand only near the end of the narrative, while he is under the table, apparently at a dinner party. He imagines her among the guests.

Edwine est très belle. . . . elle semblait l'héroïne de l'Age d'Or. . . .  
Edwine, la très soumise. . . . (157-159)

She represents innocence, purity, serenity, the bliss of happy home and hearth, the male ideal of woman. She voices fantasies of pleasure that coincide with those of the narrator, as he listens from underneath the table:

Elle dirait: j'aurai des servants autant que j'en veux. J'aurai tout ce que je veux. Même l'argent. . . . J'ai une grande maison sur la mer, plein de collines autour, des cigales. Des rossignols. C'est-à-dire elle est à toi aussi... L'odeur du tabac s'effluve jusqu'à moi, mêlée aux autres ivresses. . . . Les douces cuisses s'entrouvriraient à moi, et moi, par elles, par le plaisir affleurant au visage l'inondant, émergeant là-haut comme la vague sur la mer, je la toucherais, Elle, l'intouchable.  
Fantasmes.(163)

Bertrand's location is symbolic. He, like his subconscious thoughts, is hidden beneath the surface. Edwine's name also seems symbolic or suggestive. A feminized form of Edward, the name is ambiguously situated between the two genders. She may be understood as an embodiment of Bertrand's own suppressed feminine nature, another kind of doubling.

Like Malaure and Edwine, the Ange Exterminateur is elusive and dream-like. Bertrand struggles to remember,

vis-je ou rêvai-je le rictus dévoilant les canines? Elle passa, se dirigea vers la sortie. Ne répondit point. Elle était parfaite.  
Je me rappelle comme en un songe avoir vu Malaure glisser devant moi, au plus près, coupant le champ: il n'est point de barrière infranchissable pour Malaure, simples lois physiques. . . . Malaure disparut. . . . Je suivis l'Ange.

Un bref instant elle s'était arrêtée sur le seuil. Il pleuvait. Elle rangea son appareil et, les mains dans les poches partit sous la pluie. (51)

The Ange/double always appears as either spectator or as spectacle,

je la revis loin devant comme si elle avait fait un bond, ou que l'on eût coupé la bande. Je la perdis encore. Je la retrouvais chaque fois plus loin dans le film, pareil à un cauchemar. . . . (54)

At the end of this particular experience, Bertrand shakes himself awake, further characterizing the Ange Exterminateur as dream or fantasy, "bien longtemps après je me relevai comme d'un long sommeil, d'une maladie, tout s'est déroulé dans une hypnose de joie parfaite." (55) His realization that his fantasy is unacceptable or unhealthy is evident in his reference to "une maladie."

L'Ange Exterminateur is always present, watching, when Bertrand makes a spectacle of himself. On one particular occasion the narrator experiences a transformation or mutation which he refers to as "la Nuit transfigurante . . . qui me transmuta en un moi de moi inconnu . . . un moi sauvage." (117) He does not recognize his reflection in the mirror: "je m'étais pris ma parole pour un Autre . . . tombé d'un Ailleurs d'un Jadis et d'un Autrement." (120) When he looks into the mirror, it is not his own face but Petra's that he sees: "tout au fond du miroir, je vis l'Ange." (120) He *is* l'Ange; each is an extension, a double of the other.

L'Ange is present, not only watching as he "gives birth" to the whip in his rear, but she plays a flute and "charms" it like a snake to come out. One might read here a metaphor of the muse who brings out the "tail/tale." A multiple transformation takes place at the birth,

j'accouchais oui elles avaient dit plus vrai qu'elles ne pensaient, et je connaissais qu'accoucher est un long orgasme, je pleurais je riais je délirais, à la fin je crois je poussai un cri, mon premier cri, et je me



laissai aller doucement sur le flanc, souriant délivré, le nouveau-né  
c'était moi! (84)

Metaphorically, the self gives birth to the tail/tale that is, in fact, the self (or at least an extension of self as off-spring).

Finally, in the last pages of the novel, in a moment of epiphany, a light-filled vision of l'Ange Exterminateur, wings out-stretched, sword in hand, appears to the trembling narrator. At her appearance, a transformation or mutation occurs as the narrator experiences a flood of release from the tension created in his subconscious by the specter of all these female doubles:

mon nom, ma position, mon travail, tout y passa, comme une bonde qui s'ouvre, le relâchement, le débordement, la délivrance, et l'assouvissement et l'incontinence totale et l'urine et le sperme et les larmes, je m'en allais de partout, c'était la purgation profonde, le péché aboli, la joie parfaite. L'accomplissement d'une prophétie délivrée dans des chiottes. . . .  
En haut de l'amphi, les ailes déployées. La beauté sans merci; inutile de me retourner, Elle me transperce. Un silence s'est fait. Elle est là. Elle vient d'entrer. Je l'attendais. Elle resplendit m'enveloppe de lumière me pénètre entier, rayon gamma qui va m'irradier me mettant à nu jusqu'aux os, me retournant comme un poulpe débusquant mon mensonge, ma double vie découverte à tous. . . .(185)

He tries to revive the old discourse that has shaped his thinking with regard to women, but he is unsuccessful:

j'arrache de ma gorge le discours ancien . . . la parole hachée le souffle court. . . . [and finally,] Comment parlerais-je, la gorge scellée. Je me tais. . . . Acceptant que soit blessé à mort l'idée qui me fait exister. . . .(187-188)

She has effectively silenced him and the discourse that he represents. The scene ends with the heteroglossic entrance of another, new language, a new "voice" as the narrator imagines his own effacement.

As earlier ("Warum hast du mir verlassen"), the language is German. Rochefort dialogically juxtaposes the sacred and the profane. The *rue St. Denis* becomes the site of prostitution and sado-masochistic encounters. The German language evokes physical and psychological destruction, or effacement, wrought upon France by Hitler's nazi Germany during the war. He states,

je n'ai rien entendu. Je suis seul. Je me trouve au tableau, du chiffon effaçant, effaçant à n'en plus finir, quoi? moi, d'évidence. M'effaçant.  
Es ist vollbracht [It is accomplished/finished.](188)

The narrator's reference here is again to the suffering of Christ; the Bible records these as Christ's final words at his crucifixion.

Paul Coates, in his study on the figure of the double in literature, has made several interesting comments on writing in a foreign language, a phenomenon which occurs with some frequency in Rochefort's fiction:

if writing is a dark mirror of events, writing in a foreign language is a complex alibi. . . . The use of a foreign language somehow distances all one's statements and hands over the responsibility for them to a persona. . . . the foreign language imparts an aura to events as Latin does to the Mass. . . . Yet writing in an alien tongue is also -- dialectically -- itself a form of suicide, of living death, of alienation of the means of self-expression. . . . (94-95)

Effectively, the insertion of a foreign language here serves several purposes. It enhances the aura of the event being described and tends to draw attention to the moment within the narrative. For the character to "speak in tongues" creates a mystical effect and functions as an outward manifestation of inner transformation. As Coates further suggests, the sudden appearance of the alien language would signal a death or suicide, in this case, the death of a former self, and of a previous mode of self expression.

After this point, Bertrand no longer has a relationship with any of the women. Edwine disappears from view riding on a large, black motorcycle: "la machine rugit et s'envola au bout de la rue. Assomption." (165) The association here is with the Virgin Mary and her assumption into heaven. Comically, she flies off to heaven, not on a broom, but empowered by her own shiny phallic symbol. As for l'Ange, she is quite independent. The narrator observes, "elle a ce qu'elle veut. Elle a tout. Elle est la reine. Elle vole de ses propres ailes. L'Ange." (192) She too flies away, independent, and under the power of her own wings.

Malaure tells him, "moi non plus, cher, je n'ai pas besoin de toi. . . . A propos, j'ai demandé le divorce. J'ai finalement trouvé ma voie." (193) When Bertrand inquires about what that is, she tells him simply, "moi. Je vais écrire *nos* mémoires." (my italics, 193) The use of the plural possessive here is significant and can be read as reference to her plural selves. Another reading could be her assumption of power as writer and creator of story or history, ("her/story"). In the first quote, her use of the word "voie" is not innocent. Aloud the words "voie" and "voix" are indistinguishable. She is ready now to tell a different tale, from her perspective, in her own voice. She will have her turn to explore her/their female memories and fantasies, to give a new, different account of the female self/selves and their relationships.

As the novel ends, the narrator looks over the collection of photographs ostensibly posted on the door of his refrigerator in the kitchen. The kitchen is significant because it is an analeptic reference to a remark made earlier in the text after his wife, Malaure, has just sodomized him: "je demeurai sur les froides dalles.

Me demandant si j'allais désormais passer ma vie érotique dans des cuisines." (149)

Thus, it represents the place where he has experienced, and perhaps will experience again, fulfillment of his erotic fantasies. The kitchen is also emblematic as a place to "cook up" something, to concoct, to create. It is a place most often associated with women: "a woman's place is in the kitchen." As he looks at the images, purportedly left there by l'Ange, he ruminates,

Il me restait la cuisine.  
 Là, dans le dernier lieu où je vivais encore, elles étaient étalées sur le frigo, en 18/24, toutes, depuis le début. Les miennes, sur chacune de mes faces intéressantes: l'inaugurale, au cocktail; chez elle, en tablier à festons, lavant par terre; fouettant Ferdinand sur son plateau; nu, en chien. . . .  
 Belles photos. Bonnes prises. De quoi constituer un superbe album.  
 Une magnifique exposition (en anglais: exhibition). (94)

In a final reversal of roles, Bertrand is left, at the end, in the woman's traditional domain.

The last page, in true carnival fashion, ends in hilarity, *les fous rires*. It is a final release of tension, a fulfilling, totalizing laughter.

Je suis pris d'un rire irrépressible. Somptueux. Totalitaire. Je ne peux pas m'arrêter. . . . Je ris pour la première fois depuis que j'existe, je ris tout, je ris ma vie entière. Le monde, cette plaisanterie divine, je ris aux larmes. Nu, dépouillé de tout, je ris à en mourir et j'en meurs, je ris mon dernier instant, j'arriverai Seigneur devant Vous, en joie.  
 (195)

The *cocktail* (cock's tale or male's imaginative perception of the nature of woman) is derisively rejected, the myth dispelled. It is laughter blended with that of the implied author who laughs with Bertrand and at him, and at the whole state of affairs, "le monde, cette plaisanterie divine." Bertrand is left, alone, in the company of photographs that record his ridiculous behavior as though to suggest one last time,

"quand tu vas chez les femmes, voilà ce que tu vois! Que c'est ridicule! Regarde-toi-même! Mets-toi en spectacle! Finissons avec ces illusions."

Sex, throughout Rochefort's fiction, plays an important role, perhaps most particularly in this last group of narratives. In *Quand tu vas chez les femmes*, Rochefort rather daringly embeds her narrator in explicit sadomasochistic attitudes and behaviors generally scorned by society. In *La Porte du fond*, another taboo subject, incest, figures as an organizing theme. As analysis will reveal, however, it is not sexual activity but sexually determined identity that is the central issue in these later texts.

In *La Porte du fond*, the narrating voice is that of a young woman who retrospectively analyzes her present, mature self against a childhood self that was forced to deal with the unwanted sexual advances of her father. As does Bertrand, she feels her life, her existence, her self, conflicted and divided. For her too, boundaries between the world of fantasy and dreams and that of harsh physical realities often blur. The narrating voice of the child relates,

Maintenant j'ai une triple vie.  
Un, une vie secrète obligatoire de débauche obligatoire avec problèmes  
moraux sans issue, derrière une porte fermée.  
Deux, une vie officielle de bonne petite écolière et scoute catho. . . . et  
en complément de programme une vie familiale en trompe-l'oeil. . . .  
(195)

This triple life extends even further, she explains, to include secret sexual encounters with her uncle in a nearby cemetery as well as her "vieille vie secrète de rêve . . . avec aventures androgynes" where she would have "permission de goûter au fruit de l'Arbre de Vie." (195)

Although the narrative proceeds a-chronologically, it is tightly structured. The novel is divided into nine sections indicated by Roman numerals, each of which is further subdivided into titled mini-chapters. Part I recalls a time of innocence; Parts II and III present opposing images of the father as Prince and as Ogre; in Part IV the voice of rebellion forcefully emerges; Part V deals with persistent memories; Part VI confronts the hidden and unspoken, symbolically represented by the image of the book's title, the interior door or the door in the back; Part VII is a *mise-en-abyme* presenting the narrator's play that bears the same title as the novel, a kind of shared acting-out by a cast of numbered *faux-semblants*; Part VIII introduces an incestuous relationship of a different nature with an uncle. Finally, Part IX appeals for complicity with the reader in reading "through" the silence of the unspoken or in opening the symbolic door in order to bring out into the open what has for so long remained hidden. In reference to her chosen symbol, the narrator relates that, on the set of her play of the same title:

Je voyais déjà, tout au fond du décor, cette porte toujours refermée,  
derrière laquelle on ne sait pas ce qui se passe.  
Et devant, tout du trompe-l'oeil. (147)

The theme of the hidden and unspoken permeates the structure of the novel in a fusion of form and content. On the title page, the printed designation "roman" functions doubly as disclaimer behind which the writer may hide from any claims of autobiographical recounting and as reminder that the narrative is a work of the imagination. It further sets up tension, from the beginning, between what is fictive and what is recognizable or autobiographical in the personal life of the implied author. In a remark that seems appropriate to Rochefort's novel, the narrator admits

(here in reference to the Catholic practice of confession), "j'aime, au coeur de l'hypocrisie, mettre une touche de vérité."(92)

Present tense verbs set the scene for narration that will continue, at times, in the *passé composé*, *imparfait* and *passé simple*, leaving gaps of time unaccounted for. Again, in an offhand remark that would apply to the structure of the novel and the blurring of time lines for the implied reader, the narrator confesses, "je distingue mal dans le passé entre le présent et le futur."(55) Frequent use of analepse, ellipsis, sentence fragments, and blank space additionally creates gaps that suggest suppressed events and words. Occasionally pronouns without antecedents also find their way into the dialogic mix. Style is never innocuous, as Rochefort's intellectual narrator ironically reminds her implied, equally intellectual reader:

Les doctes nous expliquent au moyen du langage (c'est ce qu'ils ont) que par le langage on ne saurait communiquer. C'est bien vrai. Ils en sont la preuve. Par le langage on ne communique pas, ok. Mais par le style, oui, on communique, oh oui! (19)

Like all of Rochefort's writing, *La Porte du fond* is highly intertextual. These heteroglossic voices from other works derive from a range of fictional and non-fictional writing that includes such various figures as Nabokov, Freud, Maupassant, Blake, Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Socrates, Molière, Rostand, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Breton, Eluard, Proust, Louÿs, Mann, Irigaray, Duras, her own work, and, as always, the Bible. Each introduces implicit messages to the present writing, providing imaginative and expanded reading possibilities. In a sense, each intertextual voice or entry opens a new "crack" in the symbolic door.

Recalling a technique used by Marguerite Duras in *L'Amant* (1984), the point of departure for the narrative is a non-existent photo, a metaphor that will recur in

Rocheport's subsequent novel, *Conversations sans paroles*. Speaking in the conditional tense, the narrator describes an image of her own angelic innocence, at age five, depicted in this remembered, or imagined, photo. Now, the innocence and the photo are lost.

La photo je ne peux pas la montrer pour preuve, et avec le look que j'ai maintenant, de l'ange on chercherait en vain la trace.  
Je ne l'ai plus malheureusement je l'ai perdue, au cours de ma vie errante. La photo. Je ne garde rien.  
Ah, je ne suis pas née monstre.  
Tout était à faire. (31)

In a mini-chapter entitled "Métamorphoses de la photo souvenir," the voice of the mature narrator acknowledges that time, and the imagination, transform and even create images in the memory.

Ma mémoire passe directement de avant à après. Des morceaux ont sauté de mon film, et non des moindres. Pour ainsi dire je ne les connais plus que par déduction: il a bien fallu qu'ils aient eu lieu. Ma tête sait ce qu'ils sont. Mais je ne les vois pas. Et moins encore les sens: ça, rien à faire. (55)

She suggests that as a part of this distancing and the accompanying transformation and rearranging of memory that occurs in the process, a kind of understanding emerges:

je ne comprenais rien au moment où ça se passait. Pendant. Dans le présent.  
Au fait, est-ce qu'on comprend jamais dans le présent? (57)

The narrator's mental image of her father began to change when she was eight. From the smiling Prince Charming on the original photo, a series of more threatening forms present themselves as alternate images, or doubles, to the narrator. Recalling the photo, she sees him instead as a menagerie of salacious and unsavory



figures: a grinning, self-satisfied Cheshire cat, a voracious ogre, and a spider spinning its web of entrapment.

In a chapter entitled "Des papas de rêve," the narrator recalls a series of father figures that she had imagined as her own. These "other" father figures, or doubles, all would have had something to offer her that was missing in her own relationship with her actual father. Among these were the fathers of her acquaintances: Douchka's father, *un papa exotique*, and therefore interesting and exciting; Sylvia's father, conservator of the botanical gardens and knowledgeable about nature; Gisèle's father, who was *bête* and easy to trick; or even Odette's father who slapped his kids around.

Odette ne cachait pas ses malheurs. Elle pouvait causer, elle. Les beignes c'est officiel. Au catalogue. Moi pas. De moi on ne parlait pas, je n'étais nulle part. J'étais un secret honteux. Et honte j'avais. De ce qui m'arrivait. A moi. Unique de mon espèce. Avec de la marmaille pour partager ce serait quand même moins triste. Et peut-être ensemble on aurait fait la révolution.

Oui n'importe quoi valait mieux que ce que j'avais.(65)

Other men who played the role of imaginary father double were a Mr. Burton, always away on business trips, and her father's brother Paul, "charmant, et possédant une auto . . . qu'il ait quelque chose quoi."(64)

Further complicating and adding to the narrative tension, the narrator sees herself too in multiple images. Her doubles include those of angel, clown, whore, Job (of the Bible), Roxanne (character in the novel she imagines herself writing, and allusion to the heroine of *Cyrano de Bergerac*), and several animal figures such as a rat and a goat ("la chèvre de M. Séguin"). "Je suis un paradoxe!"(45) she admits, a mentally complicated one:

c'est comme je "sentais", Dieu avait deux têtes. Les deux me donnent des ordres.

"Viens ici", dit l'une, et l'autre: "Sors de là!"  
 Et n'allez pas croire que "Viens ici" serait Le Père (bien qu'il l'ait dit  
 hélas souvent), et "Sors de là" La Mère, intérieure. C'est trop simplet.  
 Les deux étaient moi.(54)

In another passage, when her actual state becomes too difficult, she escapes into fantasy that would separate her from the undesirable by imagining part of herself as dead and part as "other." Here that "other" takes animal form:

Lors, la petite chèvre de M. Seguin se couche sur la prairie dans sa  
 belle fourrure blanche qui ne l'est plus, ayant fait ce qu'elle pouvait.  
 Je m'inventai absente. Coupée en deux, un morceau qui était moi et  
 l'autre non. Je me fis morte.(100)

This doubling also results in a polyphonic multiplication of narrative voices. At the base of the dialogic interaction, the voice of the mature adult, who remembers, functions as the warp over and under which the diverse other voices are layered to form the woof in a tapestry of textual voices. In addition to voices of other characters in the novel, voices of narrator/child and narrator/young adult echo scenes from the past. Interspersed with these, the narrator/child's suppressed or interior voice finally becomes explicit in passages guilefully tagged, for example, "n'ai-je pas dit."(18) Additionally, a persistent, parenthetical voice sarcastically derides the voices of others while, at other times, a familiar voice splits from both child and adult, bantering and retorting, to question motives and desires. Then, there is the voice of the implied author that appears occasionally to offer philosophic advice or to invoke complicity on the part of the implied reader.

In the following passage, taken from the second chapter of the first section, focus shifts to the relationship between mother and daughter and to attitudes toward the daughter's writing career. Here, sounding rather painfully autobiographical, both

in tone and in content, the voices of implied author and autodiegetic narrator mingle with that of the character's mother.

A la fin, il y eut ce dialogue. Vingt ans de recherche d'allumettes le séparaient du précédent. Elle dit:

Tu t'es bien débrouillée dans la vie. Et:

Tu t'es bien fait ta publicité.

Toi qui te prétendais idéaliste. Qui voulais tout casser. . . (diriger une agence de pub en effet ça n'en a pas trop l'air. Et l'idée de derrière la tête est par définition irrévélée).

Je dis, finalement: Tu parles comme mes ennemis. Tu parles comme les gens qui ne connaissent pas. Et:  
Si tu m'avais retrouvée rue Saint-Denis dans le malheur je crois que tu aurais été plus satisfaite.

Elle dit, encore: J'espère que tu ne vas pas étaler toute ta vie dans les journaux.

(Je n'avais encore donné qu'une interview, assortie de photos, sur ma position actuelle, peu courante alors pour une femme).

Je répliquai: Pourquoi non?

Il y a des choses qu'on ne dit pas. (16,17)

Like the narrator of her novel, Rochefort was already of a mature age when she wrote this book; she was seventy-one years old. Also like her narrator, she had begun to look back and assess her life in an attempt to understand who she was, and the various forces that had influenced her sense of self. In the scene just quoted, the narrator recalls a conversation that she had had as a young adult, twenty years earlier, with her mother. The mother's penchant for reflexive forms when speaking of her daughter betrays her unspoken thought that her daughter has been self-centered and self-serving. Her choice of words such as "prétendais," "voulais tout casser" and her expressed hope that her daughter *not* make her private life public, all suggest

that, in general, she views her daughter negatively. The narrator is sensitive to these nuances, particularly now, as she recalls them.

In a gesture very like Rochefort herself, the narrator reacts vigorously in the passage immediately following where the voice of the autodiegetic narrator takes up again in an address to her implied reader. The lack of punctuation in the run-on construction here contributes to the sense of breathless, harried anger and frustration:

Le lendemain à l'aube j'ai sauté chez le notaire et je me suis donné le ridicule d'un testament, car vous ne savez ni le jour ni l'heure: comme quoi je retire à tout parent de près ou de loin y compris à naître le droit de mettre ses pattes dans ce que je pourrais laisser après moi d'aucune sorte, scripto audio visuo et à inventer et à jamais.

Pas que j'eusse alors produit quoi que ce soit de la moindre pérennité. Mais je ne supporte pas et je ne supporte pas et voilà. (17)

In a passage during which the voice of the narrator/child plots aloud the events of her novel-to-be, the narrating voice suddenly splits and a metatextual dialogue begins between the two halves of the divided self that they now represent.

Qu'est-ce qu'il a fait de mal? Il n'a pas joué au chat et la souris fait chanter ni sorti les armes. Il m'aimait...

En somme ce qui me manquait c'est l'amour et la démocratie?

D'ailleurs si tu le tues on sera en plein mélo.

Là tu as raison c'est un argument. Et si je ne le tue pas on sera où?

On sera heureux.

Ah oui, une bête histoire d'amour, alors là on plonge en pleine guimauve. . . . (66)

Taking up the narrative thread again after an ellipsis, the voice of the narrator/character blends with that of the father figure in her novel-to-be. Further drawing attention to the duality of the narrating voices, the father figure addresses the narrator/character by using a plural pronoun form:

Le papa pendant ce temps-là posé sur son fil sur un pied attend, je tombe, je tombe pas? qu'est-ce que vous décidez les filles mettez-vous d'accord. . . . (67)

The voice of the mature autodiegetic narrator dominates the ending of the novel. In a series of mini-chapters this voice sympathetically addresses her implied readers to impart the wisdom of experience and a sense of optimism for the future of her self and of others like her. Having shaken the guilt associated with her past, she encourages others to do the same:

Perdez l'illusion bonnes gens, assis dans la croyance que les malheurs passés doivent labourer la mémoire la vie durant . . . perdez l'illusion morale, si joliment plantée dans vos âmes coupables. . . . (238)

Alluding to woman's dilemma of being tandemly situated between two discourses<sup>10</sup>, the symbolic associated with the father and the pre-symbolic or semiotic associated with the mother, the narrator looks back at herself compassionately:

Je me rappelle pourtant. Je n'oublie pas. C'est là. C'est bien moi. Je me retrace: bonjour, petite. Je te regarde par le gros bout de la lorgnette, je t'aperçois là-bas, ligotée dans ton double noeud de vache. (239)

The last line of the novel makes her present condition clear. The door has been opened; the secret is out; she has survived the torturous relationship. She parts with "le sourire du survivant." (242) As for her abusive father, she suggestively states that,

ce n'est pas pour ce qu'il eut de spécial qu'il a sa place ici.  
c'est par ce qu'il a de commun. (241)

Sidonie Smith characterizes women's autobiography, not only as a transgression of cultural expectations of her authority to speak publicly, but as a response to fictions of her self that ultimately affects structure, rhetorical strategies, and thematic preoccupations of autobiographical writing in general. In sketching a poetics of women's autobiographical writing, Smith understands the "self" of autobiography,

not to be an a priori essence . . . but rather a cultural and linguistic 'fiction' constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of our storytelling . . . [combined with] the contextual influence of historical phenomena . . . [and] those intertexts that shape the autobiographer's self-interpretation. The autobiographer joins together facets of remembered experience -- descriptive, impressionistic, analytic -- as she constructs a narrative. . . . (45)

Because the writer cannot hope to recapture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the range of her experience, the fixative *I* becomes a version of self. Bakhtin, in his concept of the dialogic imagination, also rejects the notion of a private and isolated self. He suggests, rather, that humans are necessarily social beings who are

surrounded by ideological phenomena, by object-signs of various types and categories . . . by scientific statements, religious symbols and beliefs, works of art, and so on. All of these things in their totality comprise the ideological environment, which forms a solid ring around man. And man's consciousness lives and develops in this environment. (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 14)

Women's autobiographical writing, suggests Smith, tends to be especially attentive to personal interconnectedness between self and world.

Smith further distinguishes a woman's autobiographical writing as influenced by the fact that she brings a particularly troubled relationship to her reader. She knows that she is being read as *woman*. Thus, she contends,

often, projecting multiple readers with multiple sets of expectations, she responds in a complex double-voicedness, a fragile heteroglossia of her own, which calls forth charged dramatic exchanges and narrative strategies. . . . Always, then, she is absorbed in a dialogue with her reader, that 'other' through whom she is working to identify herself and to justify her decision to write about herself in a genre that is man's. . . . That situating of the autobiographer in two universes of discourse accounts for the poetics of women's autobiography and grounds its difference. . . . Manifest in women's autobiography, therefore, is a kind of double helix of the imagination that leads to a double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric. The voices of man

and woman, of Adam and Eve, vie with one another, displace one another, subvert one another in the constant play of uneasy appropriation or reconciliation and daring rejection. Those tensions play themselves out differently depending on the imaginative power, artistic talent, and breadth of experience of the individual autobiographer and on her degree of self-consciousness about her place in patriarchal culture. (49-51)

Smith's assessment of women's autobiographical writing project is precisely in line with Rochefort's last group of novels, particularly the last three that will be discussed here: *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux* (1984), *Conversations sans paroles* (1997), and *Adieu Andromède* (1997). Here, ongoing thematic issues are combined with the contextual influence of specific social and historical phenomena and cast in the light of their determining influence on the construction of self. It is also in *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux* that Rochefort's preoccupation with death begins and, along with it, an intensified interest in the act of writing as an extension and preservation of self. The cover illustration for this novel is a detail taken from the funerary banner that covered the sarcophagus of Han the first of Mawangtoui in Tch'ang-cha, China in 141 B.C. The image depicts a central figure tethered to two horses pulling in opposite directions, a cat-like animal on each of their backs. Dragons threaten from the outside edges while large, sharp-beaked birds peck at the head of the figure in the middle.

In the collection, "La part obscure," the editor's request of the writer (as quoted on the back cover of the novel) is to produce a text that is in some way unlike others that s/he has written, to offer readers a bit of "ce que je suis aussi." It is, in a way, an invitation to imaginative self-analysis and self-revelation. Rochefort certainly meets the challenge with this novel in which all of the seemingly disparate

sections, when fitted together, produce a portrait of the narrating conscience, as the writer wills that portrait to be perceived. Further, and importantly, the text suggests that this contextual influence of historical phenomena exists in the determination of all "selves."

The novel is one of the most polyphonic of all of Rochefort's texts. Its pages bring in extraneous voices from news items published and announced around the globe in a style reminiscent of the U.S.A. trilogy by John Dos Passos. Exhibiting an acute awareness of the social and political dimensions in which self and text are produced, personal text and historical context intersect to raise issues of subjectivity and gender.

This self-discovery is a process in which readers participate and through which they also may construct their own identities. The narrator frequently implicates the reader, by questioning, by direct address using both familiar and plural forms, and by referring to the her situation as one shared jointly, "nous devenons un peuple. . . . Nos frontières se déplacent sans cesse." (24) The way to that discovery, however, is anything but clear. Attention must be given not only to the voices that speak, but to the words those voices utter. As the narrator notes in the early pages of the novel (in yet another allusion to Rimbaud's "Le Bateau Ivre"):

Sur le bateau, il n'y a pas de rames. Il y a bien un gouvernail. Mais gouverner--vers où? Nous n'avons pas de boussole. . . .  
Cependant de temps à autre quelqu'un gouverne. Cela donne une sorte de sens, l'impression que nous sommes responsables de notre destin, qui n'est pas.  
Ainsi est la parole. (13)

Miscellaneous, disembodied voices appear from nowhere to question or to comment on the state of affairs, sometimes anonymously, sometimes tagged by



equally miscellaneous names. Shifting pronouns take turns as both subject and object of the narration: *nous, moi, elle, je, on, tu, vous, quelqu'un*. Much of the text can be read as metatextual, simultaneously addressing issues of writing and of the identity associated with that writing.

Narrative tension begins with the novel's title, on which the narrator elaborates in the opening sentences,

Le monde est comme deux chevaux, qui tirent chacun dans un sens. L'un, dit-elle, est un cheval-vapeur qui fait beaucoup de bruit et de fumée, l'autre est une vache sacrée qui rumine (médite), et aucun sage n'est sur son dos. J'ai découvert ça ce matin en fouillant dans les poubelles de l'Histoire. Elles puait l'enfer, jamais ça n'a été à ce point-là depuis le début je crois bien -- et en même temps il y avait quelque part très lointain comme une faible brise de, voyons, oui, de chèvrefeuille. (9)

As the narrative unfolds, the figures of the opposing *cheval-vapeur* and *vache sacrée*, ostensibly referring to vague forces in the world at large, can be understood to symbolize the masculine and feminine. As usual, Rochefort plays with words. The horse, a phallic symbol, is further depicted as mobilized by steam or "hot air." It/he is powerful, noisy and "blows a lot of smoke." The sacred cow or *vache sacrée* is a feminine animal with mystique; she is worshiped. Euphonically, the designation evokes the *vase sacrée*, a metaphor for the vagina that recurs in other Rochefortian novels.<sup>11</sup> As voices representing these two forces vie for attention and mutually respond, narrative tension builds among them.

In a sketch which will be repeated and further developed in Rochefort's subsequent novels, *Conversations sans paroles* and *Adieu Andréomède*, the narrator's voice struggles to imagine existence at its origin: "sans frontières," "sans unité," "sans lois," "sans armes," "sans histoire," and "sans identité." (25) Then, abruptly

switching to past tense the narrating voice reminisces about her childhood, separating herself from the child that no longer exists by using the pronoun *elle*. Pitting the child against the perceived enemy, "*tout ce qui était plus grand était l'ennemi*,"(27) she remembers that for the child, "*son arme était le silence*."(27) That external silence, which only masks internal discourse, will be the organizing theme of Rochefort's later novel, *Conversations sans paroles*.

The sketch is followed by a mini-chapter entitled, "1982 s'achève." The chapter consists of a series of news items reporting incidents from around the globe: Chili, Texas, Paris, Nicaragua, the Vatican, England, California, the Fairy Islands. The news items are not quoted directly. Rather, in a heteroglossic layering or blending, the narrator/implicit author reports them in her own ironic, disapproving voice, thus filtering the incidents through her own optic. She indicates in a footnote, "*ces informations sont tirées de la presse parlée et écrite*." (30) All of the items report corruption, injustice, suffering, torture, and, ultimately, death. This chapter is immediately followed by another entitled, "1982, comme un oignon." Here, in a series of commentaries paralleling or doubling those in the preceding section, the irony turns to biting sarcasm:

Projet de fronton pour chambre à gaz:  
 "Laissez cet endroit aussi propre que vous l'avez trouvé en entrant."  
 (34)

Chili\*. Les futurs torturés sont examinés par les médecins qui testent leur résistance, afin que soient élaborées des stratégies de torture satisfaisantes.(35)

Texas. Pour la première exécution capitale après le retour de la peine de mort, les médecins ont administré le sérum de vérité jusqu'à ce que mort s'ensuive. (35)

From these quips concerning current events, the narrative turns to "Contes de la veillée." In a utopic doubling, using fantasy as a reversal of present circumstances, the narrator describes an imaginary time in the past when life was "good." The narration here switches to passive voice, the uncertainty of the *imparfait*, and the preponderant use of *passé simple*, a tense reserved for non-spoken communication, for the fiction of literary writing (artful creation of illusion), and for the finality of historical documents. The sections begin with the typical fairy tale opening, "Il était une fois." (47, 49) The suggestion forwarded by these sections is that "the good old days" people tend to imagine, and tend to use as a standard against which to evaluate their own lives, never really existed. In the collective unconscious, this is the way things should be: "C'était clair. C'était simple. C'était juste." (47); "Jadis il était une fois, nous aimâmes." (49) Becoming metatextual, the passage directly implicates literature in the construction of these false memories. How people understand the abstraction of love, for example:

Nous n'avons jamais pu mettre le doigt dessus. A la place nous avons sorti de là des chansons innombrables, des poésies, faibles pour la plupart, des kilomètres de romans et quelques théories et propositions indécidables. Rien de sérieux. Nous ne faisons que nous rouler dans nos larmes. (50)

Consideration of the equally abstract concept of friendship leads back to the crisis of identity that has prompted the entire narration:

Nous avions toutes les raisons de croire que l'amitié était vraie: elle était fondée sur ce que nous étions vraiment, pour de bon et au fond.

Ha ha. Mais qu'est-ce qu'on était, vraiment et au fond? (51)

The two sections end with an acknowledgment of the challenge posed by this last question. In a dialogic passage bringing together voices of King Arthur, narrator/implicit author, and the narrator's disillusioned past self, the section concludes with the following query directed in familiar address to the implied reader:

Comme le dit Arthur avec un bel optimisme, c'est à réinventer.

C'est facile de causer: il n'y est pas arrivé, lui non plus. Et moi non plus, dit-elle, et toi? (53)

In both of the passages quoted above, blank space is inserted as though left there to be filled in by the silent, interior reflection and reaction of the implied reader.

An occasional scenette, inserted into the narrative as a kind of visual pause, adds to the novel's stylistic complexity and defines it as what Bakhtin has referred to as a metagenre or super genre containing elements of other literary genres. A short passage entitled "Elle écoute," that can be described as poetic prose or a prose poem, depicts the activity of a solitary musician who plays his instrument on a public street, seemingly oblivious to those who stand and observe. His image stands as a poetic mini-monument to the fragility of artistic and personal freedom:

Julio qui jouait de la harpe indienne sur le trottoir rue de l'Odéon.  
 Ses mains couraient volaient sur les cordes comme des oiseaux  
 vraiment comme des oiseaux.  
 Ses mains ses mains. Ses mains libres. Libres rue de l'Odéon.  
 Mains aux pouces opposables, d'espèce humaine. Et pourtant libres.  
 Fragiles, fragiles.  
 Deux hommes en imperméables mastic le regardaient.  
 Ils ne lui demandèrent pas ses papiers. Ils s'en allèrent. (59)

This poetic style continues in a more lengthy section entitled "Le cap."

Interspersed within the narration are seven *cibles*, isolated by blank space above and below: "Il faut être raisonnable;" "Il faut être sympathique;" "Il faut rire;" "Résister à

toute fascination;" "Ne pas tirer au-dessus de ses moyens;" "Voyager léger;" and "Il ne faut pas avoir de retard d'affection." (66-69) In the following pages of the section or mini-chapter, a series of the single word "non" occurs, randomly embedded into the narration. This seeding into the text of the single negative signifier imitates the practice of encoding subliminal messages in filmatic sequences with the intention of stimulating subconscious thought. The embedding here appears intended to provoke or encourage resistance to or refusal of these stated, inherited maxims.

In the last pages of the section, the narrator presents an image of Catharina R. (whose initials significantly mirror Rochefort's own) on a hilltop in Austria with a rifle in her arm while an unknown Adolf Hitler pays a visit to the family château. The image is followed by a masculine voice (identifiable as masculine only by the spelling of the verb form, "je suis arrivé. . .") (76) The voice recalls scenes of companions going toward their deaths, "il allaient mourir la tête haute," (76) while he, "tapi dans un coin, la tête haute," (76) managed to survive. Phrases and images recur in the narration as refrains: "ils allaient mourir," "la tête haute," "toutes les années." The frequency of their recurrence underscores the length of time that has passed during which these memories have persisted as well as the frequency of the scenes themselves. The reference is to divided sentiments, and the continuing debate in post World War II France, among those who did what they felt they had to do to survive the war and those others who sacrificed their lives resisting Nazi invasion. Ending with another prose poem and another direct appeal to the implied reader, the narrator relates:

Est arrivé celui qui avait souffert.  
Il était devant moi, avec sa souffrance.

J'étais devant lui, sans la mienne.  
 Nous n'étions pas à égalité.  
 Nous avions tous les deux la tête haute, mais pas la même.  
 Nous n'arrivions pas à nous regarder en face.  
 Nous ne parlions pas, ça valait mieux.

Jusqu'à quand allons-nous rester comme ça? (79)

The mini-chapters that follow take up, a year later, a continued recounting of current news items, with chapter titles similar to previous ones, "1983 s'achève" and "1983, comme un oignon." Issues of death in various forms dominate: leukemia treatments that kill the patient, war in Poland, Armenian extremist attacks in Paris, Soviet missile attacks, clinical depression among young children, toxic waste accidents, racist confrontations by the PFN in France, US marines in Grenada, laboratory animal testing. As earlier, these will disintegrate into ironic, mocking absurdity. Here, the intratextual doubling of style and content suggests the persistence and perpetuation of similar conditions as one year mirrors another.

A feminine voice then takes up the narration again, in what at first appears a contemplation of nature in intimate journalistic style: "c'est l'aube et moi assise sous l'olivier. Je vois. J'ai devant les yeux, là, à s'en pas douter, le ciel illuminé de sa couleur indescriptible." (100) As earlier, a poem is inserted into the narration, this time a celebration of the resurgence of life through images drawn from nature. The poem ends ironically, however, with yet another rhetorical question, dialogically alluding to a passage from the Bible and indirectly addressed to the implied reader:

--Croyez! Multipliez! remplissez la Terre! et l'assujettissez!  
 --Mission accomplie, Seigneur. Et maintenant? (106)

In a section of the novel entitled "Entretiens de 75013," the narration turns to more direct metatextual commentary. Of particular interest to the narrating voice is the evolution in words that, in turn, signals an evolution in traditional male dominance. The time of referring to humanity as "Man," the narrator notes, is beginning to fade away.

Les signes il ne peut pas contrôler: ils sont de ce qui est. Et quand les signes sont convergents, ils annoncent l'ébranlement(111). . . . Son nom jadis claironné a mis une sourdine: son grand H chancelle sur ses jambages, frappé d'incertitude (112). . . . Dites: "Tu seras un Homme, mon fils", et essayez de ne pas rire. (113)

The narrator points to specific words that seem to have lost their impact: *misanthrope* "n'est plus prononcé;" *progrès* "s'est passablement déballonné en ces années;" *civilisation* "ne se montre plus que dans les déclarations de guerre;" *humanisme* "s'accroche encore . . . mais il n'est pas heureux." (114-116) Referring again to the metaphor of the novel's title, the narrator remarks that,

pendant que nous sommes assis méditant, l'autre cheval se dégingle de partout, perd ses boulons et sa belle confiance, s'effondre du dedans. Ses fumées ne s'élèvent plus dans le ciel, son vacarme s'est tu. On entend les oiseaux l'eau courante et le vent.(118)

Another reading here, on a more personal or individual level, would suggest the narrator's own sense of relief from the strong forces of duality ("*nous sommes assis*") competing for her own inner sense of self. The domination of masculine forces, symbolized by the metaphor of the horse, is beginning to fade. The liberation she feels, from the noisy din and the noxious smoke of his engines, is symbolically represented by the sounds of birds, flowing water and wind.

What follows is dialogic interplay created through a series of prose poems ostensibly dedicated to singing the praises of "l'exil à la maison," that is to say

woman, or possibly "a" woman. The poems are prefaced by "Psaume 137. 1984," which serves as a kind of introduction to what follows. An anonymous voice sings the first, "Chant de l'exil at home." The voice familiarly addresses the woman as a single subject "tu."

Tu n'étais ni très grande ni très brillante,  
 Tu n'étais pas spécialement bien placée,  
 et dans le monde on ne te remarquait pas.

Mais tu tournais, tu tournais ma belle,  
 tu tournais juste le temps  
 de faire le jour et la nuit.  
 ...  
 comme l'erreur. (121-122)

The "Réponse au chant de l'exil" is a prose passage ostensibly representing the voice of the creator. He first acknowledges his mistake and apologizes: "c'est vrai, j'avoue, c'était une erreur. Je suis désolé. Je ne l'ai pas fait exprès. Quand j'ai lancé mes billes celle-là s'est posée de travers et je ne m'en suis pas aperçu sur l'instant. . ."(123) The ambiguous and condescending use of "celle-là" opens the passage to metaphorical and metatextual reading. Sounding increasingly like a description Rochefort may have given of herself as a writer, the voice refers to *l'exil* and her creation as "une instable," "sans cesse à bricoler des trucs . . . de plus en plus compliqué." (123) The voice continues, "elle a trouvé un système tout à fait stupéfiant d'autoreproduction à complexité croissante. . . C'est une miniaturiste." (124) Halfway through his lengthy response, an anonymous voice contests, "je n'y crois pas." (125) Further opening up the possibility of autobiographical reading, the voice of the creator continues, complaining, "et sa dernière: s'inventer un miroir. . . Et comment me sortir de là puisque c'est encore et toujours ses sacrés miroirs qui



parlent ce que je dis?"(125) Reading metatextually, the *miroirs* can be understood as literary texts that pretend to reflect the world and its speaking inhabitants through mimesis.

In the "Réponse à la réponse" that follows, "je," sounding much like a writer who is feeling weary, depleted, and tormented by persistent dissatisfaction and worry over her own creations, replies:

Je serais restée éternellement jeune et  
belle  
si je n'avais engendré cet enfant. Ce mal-  
heur.  
Il me gratte il me pique il me mord me  
perfore  
il me creuse partout me crevasse me cou-  
vre de croûtes de crasse

...

Plus d'eau propre pour me laver  
mes fleuves ne coulent plus ma mer est  
pleine,  
mes balcines fuient mes océans, mes  
oiseaux tombent de mon ciel, . . . (127)

In a final "chant," an undesignated voice reassures, "ils étaient, pourtant, les seuls yeux dans lesquels tu te reflètes entière. Ils étaient, pourtant, ta Connaissance. C'est eux, . . . Qui ont doublé les pétales de tes roses . . . Qui ont multiplié tes fruits . . . T'ont copiée recopiée (124) . . . et vont faire de toi un caillou mort."(129-130) Again, reading metatextually suggests that writing doubles, extends and preserves the self.

Further contributing to a metaphorical and metatextual reading, the narrating voice takes up again, distancing itself as observer from a nameless *elle*. As this woman contemplates a landscape painting, she senses the final solitude of death

suggested there and realizes that art is capable of communicating without words:

"elle . . . éprouve, connaît, le sentiment de la solitude dernière . . . Que Patinir seul fut capable de lui communiquer, par l'unique moyen d'une couleur."(133)

The next nineteen pages consist of a series of eight brief sections representing the utterances of undesignated voices, each expressing distress, most in first person, according to his/her perceived, personal condition. The sections are variously titled as lamentations: "Lamentation de classes I," "Lamentation de classes II," "Lamentation de classes III," "Lamentation secondaire," "Le bon vieux temps," "L'empire du malheur," "Lamentation en marge," "Lamentation au sommet," "Lamentation culturelle," and Lamentation fraternelle." Some of the voices declare personal anguish due to lack of self-esteem or lack of respect from others, even avowing thoughts of suicide. Some ironically observe, in feigned detachment, the destruction wrought by others due to incompetence, indifference, malfeasance, and self-indulgence. What appears, ostensibly, as the voice of God enters the chorus in the "Lamentation au sommet." Evoking the image of Sisyphus,

Longtemps j'ai été celui qui n'y arrive pas. Chaque fois, je montais au créneau. Et je me ramassais. Je me donnais un mal de chien. . . . Aussi avec tout ça, je ne rajeunissais pas. . . .Est-ce que ça valait la peine de monter, puisque après on ne peut que redescendre?(148-149)

the voice also dialogically resonates with that of the implied author whose writing career had suffered continual ups and downs with regard to public acceptance. The choice of images such as isolation within a towered niche further suggests solitary work that is the condition of the writing figure. And then too, the earthy tone of voice and choice of lexicon in expressions such as: *mal de chien; ça y était -- et plaf,*

*au tapis; tout le monde me tombe dessus; and j'essaye seulement de faire moins de saloperies*, sound much more Rochefortian than divine.

In the section entitled "Lamentation culturelle," an unidentified voice, speaks from the margins of literary discourse: "oï, ce que je voudrais être des autres! . . . Je veux faire partie. . . J'essaye d'absorber. Je lis leurs oeuvres. . . J'ouvre mes oreilles. . . Je veux m'altérer par imprégnation. Car il n'y a pas d'autre voie. . ." (149-151) Here, as earlier, the use of *voie* (rather than *façon* or *moyen*, for example) seems expressly chosen to evoke its homonym *voix*. It is lack of authority, however, rather than desire to conform, that motivates the lamentation of the speaking voice.

Ce n'est pas parce que je les aime. Ça ne se situe pas là. C'est que je souffre du manque: moi, je n'ai pas l'éternité derrière moi. . . mais si j'avais fait partie et que j'eusse survécu, j'aurais reçu des trésors en héritage. (152)

A listing of past literary greats produces only a shiver of repulsion, "les Grecs antiques. Les Romains! Racine. Boileau. Brrr. Château de Versailles. Napoléon. Ah on n'est pas gâtés." (153) Only a few arouse admiration, voices of past revolutionary figures: "Ah, Diderot. Ça en fait un. Rimbaud, deux. On compte sur les doigts. Quelques poètes, généralement jetés dans des asiles. . . Pauv' nous." (153)

In the "Lamentation fraternelle," a third person voice resumes the narration to describe a divided sensibility in terms of a fraternal relationship. Beginning with "elle avait un frère. Il ne le savait pas. Elle non plus," (155) this brother can be understood as a double or suppressed extension of the feminine self. When he attempts to expose or to impose himself publicly, he is met with scorn. So, he takes on disguises,

Il avait fini par passer pour une sorte de guignol. . . . Un jour dans son désespoir, il a inventé d'être un autre. Repartant complètement à zéro. Et cet autre il a chargé d'être vraiment lui. . . . Et lui pendant ce temps-là à titre d'alibi il devait continuer comme avant avec la double journée et l'indifférence générale. (155)

This duality is further developed in the next section, "et moi, et moi!" in which "le droit et le gauche sont en bagarre." (161) The principal metaphor is that of a hydra. All belonging to the same body, the many heads (and thus the many voices that issue from them) are themselves confused about their own identities as well as those of the other heads with which they are confronted. This confusion is evidenced in a continual slippage of pronouns which refer alternately to constantly shifting designations of both *droit* and *gauche*, pronouns such as *le*, *la*, *il*, *elle*, *lui*, and *nous*. At one point the hydra attempts to put an end to the confusion by hacking off one of the other heads:

Là c'est la bagarre ouverte, à la faveur de cette confusion soudain, bang (par surprise comme toujours), surgit de son trou le droit et d'un grand coup de métaphore incongrue tranche la tête de l'hydre, et du même mouvement dans son filet ramène le "nous" -- "le nous" qui est, qui est le, la, l' . . . de ce qu'elle est en train de faire.

--Et c'est quoi? dit le gauche, dit l'hydre ayant déjà repoussé une nouvelle tête.

Je ne sais pas dit le droit, je ne veux pas le savoir! dit-elle se bouchant les oreilles mais c'est dedans que ça parle.

Issue incertaine. (162-163)

The ambiguous situation will not be resolved. Taking possession of the voice in first person, the monster laments,

--Mon dieu mais qu'est-ce que je fais là-dedans! se récrie le gauche . . . et du coup s'emparant de la première personne et elle ne peut pas lui donner tort, mais j'ai pas envie de m'occuper de ça du tout moi! dit-il dit-elle dit tout le monde sauf le droit dans son coin qui marmonne: je ne sais pas. (163)

Interiority dominates the narrating voice in a flow of free indirect discourse. The narrating voice, however, continues to be interrupted by intrusions from other ethereal, spiritual-sounding voices who question each other, who question existence, who point out the oppressive and determining weight of infinity, and who regard time as generally out of sync. One, for example, insists that, "la voie de l'Ordre Parfait en est à s'enfanter des idéologues, des célébrateurs, avec disciple, elle infeste les plus grandes universités. . . l'Ordre est infiltré dans l'espèce," and another notes that "les maux ci-décrits étaient situés dans l'avenir." (171) "Est-elle en train de mettre Dieu de côté du désordre?" questions another.

Taking on a sharply sarcastic tone, split narrating voices mock the perceived current state of affairs, particularly mindlessness and dehumanization resulting from over-dependence on modern machinery and technology. In "la Nouvelle Évolution de l'Espèce," the voice warns "un jour on ne sera plus nécessaires." (190) Mixing tenses to subtly indicate the gradual development of the current crisis of being, the voice notes that "la pensée était en voie d'élimination." (193) In utter derision, the voice rails against the powerlessness of the individual in the face of such pervasive determinism. Implicating the implied reader in what is perceived as the elimination of human capacity or the implied death of the human self as traditionally defined through its thought and action, and using the pejorative "ça" with reference to those vague, controlling forces that would seek to destroy it, the voice intones:

Ça avait une puissance énorme. Ça vous enveloppait comme une matrice. Mais froide. Et Ça ne refusait personne, Ça n'était pas regardant. Ça disait: bougez pas je vais le faire pour vous. Et Ça le faisait. Et on ne bougeait plus. Chaque chose que Ça faisait pour vous, vous ne le faisiez plus. Ça vous entraînait à l'intérieur, Ça prenait la place

d'un membre, des yeux, d'un bout de cerveau. Ce que Ça prenait en charge, Ça ne le rendait plus. (192)

In a final lamentation, the narrating voice projects into the future and envisions a transformation or recreation of self. This new self, her eyes fixed on Istar, Babylonian and Assyrian goddess of love and fertility, will become one with the rest of nature and desires full release of her suppressed, interiority:

J'arriverai dans un île. Je me coucherai sur le sol. Je mangerai la terre.  
Le ciel sera au-dessus de ma tête. Le soleil me brûlera, l'eau me lavera. Mes yeux ne verront que les arbres, les bêtes, et l'eau des sources. Je ne toucherai que ce qui est. Je ne serai plus un homme.  
Dieu soit béni, je ne serai plus un homme!

Que le bâton me touche, que je sois une fontaine. Il n'y a qu'à briser l'enveloppe, Seigneur: tout cela est dedans. (199)

Observing this new being from afar, the narrating voice describes her actions as she walks into the sea and becomes one with it: "elle marche dans la mer. . . Elle est chez elle. Elle est isomarine." (201) The image of equality and identity with nature extends into the succeeding section as the narrator contemplates her as she, in turn, observes the activity of birds. The narrator notes that their actions and hers are much the same:

Ils crient, trissent, stridents, emplissent l'azur de leur faim. Ils piquent entre les blocs, enjaillissent verticaux, virent, et fondent encore et glissent au fond des ruelles, et ascensionnent, freinent à queue ouverte, et replongent et remontent et s'élancent, piaillant, dis après la même mouche, et se débloquent et se rameutent et lui passent à un cheveu du nez. Ici, elle est à leur niveau. . . Elle en est encerclée, cernée, enveloppée, mais ils s'en foutent, ne la distinguent pas du reste. . . (205)

Voicing a theme that will be further developed in Rochefort's final two novels, she thinks, "je n'existe pas. J'appartiens. Je suis au monde!" (206)

In the final pages of the novel, through the metaphor of a shattered mirror, a *miroir éclaté*, the narrator reports that "elle voit au-dedans d'elle son vrai visage d'avant la naissance." (217) An undesignated voice then takes up the narration one last time in first person to look tenderly at her/his split self or double. Addressing that complex, multi-dimensional and androgynous being with new wisdom, new understanding, and new tolerance, and acknowledging the inescapable influence of social and political environment, s/he declares:

Mais moi, moi, je t'aime. Tu es ce petit animal pathétique. . . . Tu es un peu informe and il y a des défauts . . . mais on aperçoit pour quoi tu étais né. Tu n'es pas fini, et tu ne le sera jamais, . . . tu es une vraie chose petit être, pleine de traces et de cicatrices, à jamais imparfaite, mais moi je t'aime car je sais de quelle bataille tu es le héros vaincu et désolé . . . tu avais été pétri et remodelé par la réalité des choses. . . . (220-222)

The note of optimism sounded in the opening sentences of the novel, "il y avait quelque part très lointain comme une faible brise de voyons, oui, de chèvrefeuille," resonates here at the end in the narrator's closing words, "je t'aime. Car je sais. J'ai vu. Une fois, pour un court instant . . . ton visage originel." (223)

Like *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, Rochefort's last two novels, *Conversations sans paroles* and *Adieu Andromède* proceed as an assortment of observations that, in their conglomerate, produce a portrait of the narrating consciousness. In them, the penchant for poetic form becomes increasingly significant, metatextual interest continues to heighten, and autobiographical disposition of content becomes noticeably marked. Although the narrating voice is no longer at odds with itself and splintered into varying pronoun designations such as *je*, *tu*, and *elle*, or *il*, the narrating consciousness is the medium through which an

understanding of both the self and the world are offered. Themes of death and oneness with nature introduced in *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux* continue to motivate these narratives. Along with these newer themes, the novels also reintroduce secondary themes familiar to earlier Rochefortian novels: ecology, modern urban architecture, the powerful versus the weak, the value of the individual within the masses, the sense of alienation, and, as always, the general failure of language as a communicative tool. As in the novels discussed earlier in this chapter, the figure of the double continues to function dialogically as a kind of symbolic voice within the narrative.

*Conversations sans paroles*, perhaps because of concerns that its first person narrating voice and identifiable autobiographical content would limit interest in the book to a single facile interpretation or reading, is expressly subtitled *Roman*. Thus, again, Rochefort immediately sets up tension by blurring distinctions between art and actuality. The title itself, tense with paradox and ambiguity, announces the negation of words as a medium of communication and suggests an unusual kind of dialogic encounter.

Like *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux*, *Conversations sans paroles* is a relatively short novel (110 pages), structured into a number of seemingly disparate mini-chapters, like a "feuilletage d'énonciations," each bearing brief, emblematic titles. Through a kind of structural doubling, each title picks up, from the preceding chapter, a word, phrase or idea that will be reconsidered and developed in a different vein, thus linking the elements of the narrative, like those of a musical score, through association, extension, and variation. This technique of expanding an idea through



association recalls the automatic writing of the surrealist movement that had attracted Rochefort early in her writing career. In addition, Rochefort's poetic use of repetition, metaphor and sensual imagery in this novel effectively blends form and content as the writer continues to evoke an essence that lies teasingly below or beyond the plane of language. Here is a dialogic that is rather a "counter logic" or a *dia-non*-logic that seeks, instead of *logos* or the word, a level of semiotic communication.

The first chapter of the novel, "Non maternable," opens in confessional style as the first-person narrator reveals her mature age, "six décennies," in a familiar address to the implied reader, "écoute, je vais te faire une *honteuse* confidence: ma mère me manque"(7). The sense here, however, is not regret for the person of her mother, but the consequent feeling of solitude and lack caused by her refusal of the role represented by this traditional double. She tersely contends, "je suis une orpheline-née. Non maternable."(10) Her feeling of alienation and lack continues in the following chapters, as the theme of the absent mother is further developed. Having refused to acknowledge the mother as double, the narrator then feels compelled to fill that void with other forms of doubling that can bring the desired sense of fulfillment or totality and identity. In the next chapter, for example, a metatextual comment associates this sense of lack with her commitment to writing. Asked by other women, whom she sarcastically describes as "les mémés aux énormes fessiers" with "les larges faces avachies," about her children, the narrator firmly responds, "je n'en ai pas. . . . J'avais autre chose à faire . . . (la preuve ci-dessous)."(12) The lack the narrator attempts to convey takes form in the third

chapter as a missing photo, a doubling device also used in *La Porte du fond*. In a passage sounding very like one that might be found in a novel by Duras, the narrator comments: "elle était belle, à dix-huit ans, sur la photo de mariage. Ma mère. . . . Comment cette photo était tombée dans mes mains je ne sais plus, d'ailleurs je l'ai perdue." (15)

The associations in these early chapters move from mother, to childhood, to school days, to other people's children, to pictures, to family roots and hometown, to sights and sounds of childhood, and so on. From the now absent sound of bees associated with the time of her childhood represented by the absent photo, the narrator launches an attack against capitalist consumerism's disregard for ecology that brought destruction to the native bees of her region in the form of lice inadvertently imported with cargo from the orient. In this same chapter, whose title "Abeilles" doubles as an emblem of lack as well as of ecological concern, the narrator pauses to pay homage to LaMartine as she offers a dialogic parody of "Le lac."

Ô lac, l'année à peine a fini sa carrière  
Et près des flots chéris qu'elle devait  
revoir  
Regarde, je viens seul m'asseoir sur cette  
pierre.  
Quoi pierre? Y a plus de pierre, y a une  
autoroute.  
Je ne peux pas m'asseoir sur une auto-  
route. (22)

A remembered conversation with her mother, in a chapter entitled "Sans retour," ostensibly provokes the narrator and serves as an underlying motivation for her desire to delve beneath the surface of expressed language in order to discover the

essence of what is being communicated. For the narrator, the mother's eyes belie her comments. What she says, and what the narrator understands, do not coincide. This occurrence initiates a dialogue thematically doubling Rochefort's earlier novel, *Heureux qu'on va vers l'été* and her nonfictional treatise *Les Enfants d'abord*, both of which assert the rights of children and condemn the authoritarianism of adults. Here the narrator again revisits the absent *photo de noce* and again finds a lack of any resemblance: "comment ils m'ont faite -- me demandai-je (immodeste): rien de commun, aucun trait, ni de l'un ni de l'autre; ni entre eux ni en moi. . . . Je suis bien (quelle chance) le fruit du hasard. Sauf les yeux de ma mère." (31-32) Pertinent exception, since it was precisely the eyes that the narrator had signaled as "telling a different story," and as being the "true" communicators. Then, pausing to offer further metatextual comment, the narrator denies any autobiographical intention, stating that,

ce livre, si ça en devient un . . . ne vise pas à raconter ma vie. . . . Ce sera, si j'y parviens, à travers ses divagations, et ses émerveillements, l'histoire . . . de ce que portent les yeux, de ce qu'ils délivrent, et échangeant, au-delà des paroles, et sans elles. (33)

Synthesizing the two ideas (of eye communication and chance) introduced in this chapter, the word "hasard" is taken up again to double as the title of the next chapter which will recount a brief exchange made through eye contact. The significance of that fortuitous occurrence, however, is the transcendence of time, through memory and the imagination, that the moment of semiotic communication initiates. The narrative of this next chapter departs from a parodic reworking of the opening line from Proust's *Du Côté de chez Swann*: "longtemps, le matin, je suis allée à la chasse." (37) Her remark is immediately followed by a denial of the

significance of the utterance when the words alone are considered: "ce n'était pas le matin. Ce n'était pas à la chasse. Il n'y avait ni proie ni chasseur, ni intention ni but."(37) The meaning lies elsewhere. The narrator poetically describes this semiotic process as "comme un pont jeté"(40) and "un saut dans l'inconnu."(41)

From here, the following chapters digress to ironically explore non-verbal communication among "lower" life forms such as dinosaurs, oysters, and even plants. The big question is, "ce courant qui passe entre les yeux . . . en quoi c'est fait?"(44) Dialogically introducing quotations from Descartes ("je pense donc je suis"), the "grosses têtes" of television fame, and Jankélévitch's *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien* (on the subject of enchantment: "la durée infinitésimale d'un instant, l'espace infinitésimal d'un point"), into the discussion, the narrator makes clear her own alliance with the latter. As if to strengthen her position with regard to the power of the eyes to communicate non-verbally, character zones are created when the narrator's voice becomes inflected with those of absent figures whose verbal reactions to perceived "looks" would have included remarks such as, "pourquoi vous me regardez comme ça?"

From consideration of non-verbal communication among lower life forms, the discussion again turns metatextual as the narrator reflects on attempts of literature in general to describe these fleeting moments of epiphany when two souls make contact. The narrator notes that the experience has long been the subject of novelistic literature and poetry in particular. Here the voices of Hugo, Baudelaire, and Char heteroglossically enter the dialogic mix as the narrator introduces quotations from their work. A problem that the narrator points out, however, is the

tendency of these to limit understanding of this experience by equating it with love. The result, she notes, is not only glorification and distortion, but seduction of the reader who responds by seeking to fill the lack in her/his life through doubling or imitation:

L'amour, à quoi tout nous convie, l'amour porté aux nues par un propagande intensive à tous les niveaux. En bas les romans à l'eau de rose fabriqués à l'ordinateur, des monceaux de magazine, des pubs à foison, des films: là l'amour est fait agent actif de l'entrée en conformité.(64)

Metatextual commentary continues in succeeding chapters as the narrator considers the treatment of the subject of love in her own past literary efforts. In a chapter emblematically entitled "Archéologie," Rochefort's autobiographical references are unmistakable. Citing from her own *Repos du guerrier*, "Si de l'amour on ôte tout ce qui n'est pas lui, il ne reste rien,"(67) the implied author/narrator recalls the "sacrifice" she made in making the male character her *porte-parole*, "le 'je' étant le personnage le plus éloigné de moi."(67) She pays homage to her literary mentors Philippe Soupault and Georges Lambrichs. Then, drawing upon the words of Truman Capote to describe her lifelong love affair with writing, she echoes,

Désormais 'enchaînée pour la vie à un maître très noble, mais sans merci' (Truman Capote), je connais le bonheur d'écrire, et de découvrir: l'amour véritable, au-dessus de tout soupçon, je l'ai découvert en écrivant *Archaos*: celui qui n'attend pas de retour. (68-69)

Writing, in Capote's analogy, is seen as a master/slave relationship, another form of doubling. Rochefort, too, had expressed a similar sentiment, with a typical touch of ironic humor, in her 1970 publication, *C'est bizarre l'écriture*:

Je crois que la seule relation vraie à la littérature est d'en faire et d'en lire, deux façons équivalentes de faire l'amour avec, et tout le reste

est, excusez-moi je dois aller au bout de mon analogie, masturbation, d'ailleurs c'est on ne peut plus exact (voire un peu optimiste). (18)

For this narrator/writer, *archéologie* doubles a metaphor for the writing process: "écrire (sérieusement) c'est de l'archéologie." (71) Like archeology, it is, for her, a process of self-discovery involving digging, uncovering, history, study, and of finally putting the findings of discovery in context. For the reader it can be a uncovering or discovery of voices and meanings embedded in the text. This concept approximates Bakhtin's *architectonics*, which envisions the literary hero as a construction determined by sociohistorical context. As explained by Morson and Emerson,

Bakhtin defines architectonics . . . as 'a focused and indispensable non-arbitrary distribution and linkage of concrete, singular parts and aspects into a finished whole, [something that is] possible only around a given human being as hero.' . . . (70)<sup>12</sup>

For her, narrative, through form rather than through language, rekindles and communicates "ce qu'aucun discours ne sait," and in defiance of time.

Dans le récit, l'émotion de cet instant passé, si bref, si éloigné soit-il, se réveille, toute fraîche, et vive. Excitante. Présente. Comme si c'était hier. Ce n'est pas touché par le temps. (75)

Its essence and its significance lie in "what might have been."

The aleatory nature of these experiences of discovery, and their effect of momentarily effacing time, becomes the theme of other embedded narratives: more chance encounters, old friendships renewed. The narrator's observation that "ça n'a pas de fin" (88) prompts a pause and then abruptly, in association with *fin*, thoughts of death: "À part la mort." (88) In a metatextual reminder, the narrator comments on

the sudden intrusion of that weighty subject into her account "la mort, qui tout d'un coup s'introduit dans ce récit, non invitée, non prévue. . ."(89)

Once introduced, the themes of death and the lack of time that it portends will continue to the end of the novel. Particularly pertinent to these themes is the narrator's own writing project: "il ne me manque pas grand-chose . . . Tant que j'écris. Quand j'écris, j'avance à l'intérieur de moi. Par des chemins inattendus. Je viens de découvrir ça. En écrivant. Ce qui me manque c'est un autre monde."(95) In a final passage of free indirect discourse, the narrator suddenly pauses to contemplate her own proposal about that other, utopic world and question it. Revealing the narrator's/implicit author's indomitable spirit and her self-declared identity both as writer and as part of nature, the voice poetically proclaims:

Ce serait une autre vie, non?

C'est une proposition. Sérieuse.

Et moi, je vais continuer.

Tant que je serai disponible -- entendez,  
capable d'écrire.

Et le moment venu -- pas avant, pas  
avant:

Mon corps à la terre, et mon esprit  
aux électrons qui l'ont créé.(110)

Both of Rochefort's last two books, *Conversations sans paroles* and *Adieu Andromède*, were published in 1997, the year before her death. In these final works, perhaps in anticipation of that inevitable event, the writer's tone softens somewhat as memories begin to move her focus inward and temper her vision of the world and its creatures. A new tenderness finds expression within her fantasies, along with

continued optimism, yet, as always, couched in often the irreverent, ironic language that is Rochefort's trademark.

The thesis forwarded by the novel *Conversations sans paroles*, that "real" communication lies in a dimension beyond the scope of words, is put into effect, or put to the test, in *Adieu Andromède*. The book bears no identifying label, no designation, for example, as *roman*. The shortest of all Rochefort's books, it consists of only sixty-seven pages. If Rochefort intended that it be read as a novel or, as Hutton suggests, a collection of prose poems, is unknown and unimportant. What is significant, is that the book attempts to communicate differently. It is the sort of text that Barthes refers to in *Le Plaisir du texte* in which, "il n'y a pas derrière le texte quelqu'un d'actif (l'écrivain) et devant lui quelqu'un de passif (le lecteur)"(29). Rather, as Rochefort's narrator in *Conversations sans paroles* proposes, it requires actively responsive and creative reading.

*Adieu Andromède* is a text that is desirous of a "meeting of the eyes," a communication or *conversation* that transcends the printed words. In a collection of thirty-two poetic prose passages, *Adieu Andromède* offers meeting places for the metaphorical "rencontre des yeux." In presenting assorted fragments, as suggested in *Conversations sans paroles*, of "la vie, avec ses hésitations, les inflexions de la voix, les silences, les gestes, l'animation. . ."(74), the text attempts to "faire entendre ce qu'aucun discours ne sait"(74), or, in other words, to communicate differently. To derive pleasure from this kind of text, the implied reader must engage with the text in the manner Barthes suggests when he writes: "le texte: il produit en moi le meilleur plaisir s'il parvient à se faire écouter indirectement; si, le lisant je suis entraîné à



souvent lever la tête, à entendre autre chose"(41). Nathalie Sarraute, too, suggests in *L'Ère du soupçon* that the implied reader must go beyond the surface, beyond "ce que voient les oiseaux"(126) to "see" a deeper, more complex, clearer understanding of life and circumstances than s/he could acquire by considering only what is obvious or superficial.

*Adieu Andromède* opens with a single sentence, poetically arranged into five lines and placed in the center of the page under the lone word *MAI*:

Au petit lever du dernier croissant  
à la fenêtre de l'est, là où  
il était une fois le petit bois  
j'écoute  
le souvenir des rossignols.

The passage blends subtle, ironic hopefulness and nostalgia, bringing together what is, what was, and what could have been. The singular title, *mai*, suggests freshness, awakening, renewal, life, new beginnings. In the first line, dawn is juxtaposed with the final stages of the crescent moon. The window *opens* with anticipation toward the east, direction from which the sun rises, from which the biblical wise men arrived, and which is mystically associated with the divine. From here the idyllic and fanciful "once upon a time," common to children's literature, and evokes an imaginary, magical forest or "petit bois" that now no longer exists except in the narrator/implied author's imagination. Sensually appealing to sight and sound, the first person narrator listens to remember the absent melodies of the nightingales, tiny birds whose nocturnal singing is most often heard during mating season. It is lack, represented by the absent song, its yearning for the other, within a no longer existent (and perhaps even imaginary) forest, that provides a point of departure and

motivation for the collage of mini-narratives that comprise the book. It is as if the narrator presents these scenettes in the hope that the implied reader will "see" what she "sees" when she considers each one. Here, in this introductory passage, focus is on what the narrator does *not* see or hear that is significant. The woods are gone and with them the birds. The narrator is alone and nostalgic for what used to be, implying desire for what could be again.

Of the thirty-two sections, scenettes or passages, twenty-four engage directly with nature. Titles of some of these, for example, include: *Pain, Pomme, Fourmi, Été, Palombes, Grives, Chat, Jardin nuit, Bêtes, Ane, Étoiles, Collines, Bout de bois*, and others. Each presents a situation that relates in some way to the human condition, often revisiting favorite Rochefortian themes, but with a newer gentleness of tone that implies a degree of resignation.

In a chapter entitled "*les voisins*," the narrator describes the moment when she first remembers seeing the distant galaxy, Andromède, from which the book's title is drawn. Her reaction is immediate and the effect of her discovery profound:

on n'est pas seuls! . . . Il y a des autres! . . . Même si on bousille notre planète . . . il restera du monde! Quel monde, peu importe. Je n'insiste pas qu'il soit humain. Du monde. Quelque chose. Pas RIEN! Peut-être ceux d'Andromède s'en tireront mieux que nous. . . . Ça a changé ma vie de les voir. Depuis, je me sens mieux. La solitude essentielle, connais plus.(61)

The distant galaxy becomes a hopeful source of kindred spirits, of physical and spiritual doubles. The book's title, *Adieu Andromède*, now becomes significant and may be understood a number of different ways. Andromède symbolizes the utopian possibility of a more perfect world and a more satisfying existence. It is emblematic of fulfillment of the narrator's longed for sense of totality, togetherness and sense of

peace. She does not choose *au revoir Andromède*, inappropriate since she has never seen or encountered the imagined inhabitants of this galaxy. Rather, it is *adieu*. *Adieu* is full with connotation, bringing with it the poetry and nostalgia of the past as well as evoking the finality of death and the utopia of togetherness with god in heaven. The title, in its fullness then, suggests another time, another world where the narrator will find an end to solitude, and at last enjoy the feeling of totality in becoming harmoniously one with the rest of the universe.

In the final chapter or section, "*vie et mort de la rue courbe*," the season is again springtime, in the month of May. Looking backward in time, the narrator once more contemplates the activity of birds, the annual arrival in mass of thousands of swifts. As she watched, she remembers the sensation of being caught up in the excitement of their return, "*prise dans l'intensité de la vie*." (65) The concerted task of the swifts was to find and refurbish their abandoned nests, where they would begin anew their cycle of life. Abruptly, the narrative switches to present tense, with the narrator once more at the site of the bird's annual return:

en mai 89 rue Courbe, je me gare comme d'habitude. Le coeur me manque: plus de maisons ocre. . . Béton gris. Rien où s'agripper, nulle part où se couler, plus de vieux nids, pas de creux où en faire de nouveaux, rien. . . Où maintenant où?(66)

Mirroring the *courbe* of the street below, the birds turn and circle in confusion, not understanding what has happened, finding no hospitable place where they can build their nests, and not knowing what to do. The narrative of this chapter, and the book, end with a rhetorical question: "*Y penser? Penser à des oiseaux?*" (67)

*Adieu Andromède* is the only one of Rochefort's books with a dedication page. On it, a single line mimics the voice of God to state ironically: "*Si j'avais su je*

me serais reposé le sixième jour." The remark, of course, refers to the biblical story of creation and considers "mankind," God's creation on the sixth day, a mistake. To the end, the writer's reproach of behavior among her species does not waver, nor does her ironic sense of humor diminish. Earlier narrative tendencies, however, to introduce characters and to provide plot or story for example, gradually yield to a flow of free indirect speech from undesignated voices. The random and shifting perspectives of those multiple voices evidence a preoccupation with complex issues of self and identity. Poetic and self-reflexive, Rochefort's later novels increasingly focus on the act of writing in the doubling of both text and self.

## NOTES

1. In *The Autobiographical Contract*, Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiographical novel as "any piece of fiction for which the reader may have reason to suspect, on the basis of what he guesses or thinks to be resemblances, that there is identity between author and the protagonist, even though the author has chosen to deny . . . that identity." (201)

2. Ramsey's analysis centers on work by three well-established writers: Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance*, Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant*, and Robbe Grillet's *Le Miroir qui revient*. For Ramsey, the first of this new breed of autobiographies was Roland Barthes's *Barthes par Barthes* (38). The image of the tightrope occurs again in another study of this new genre by Leah Hewitt in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (1990). Hewitt, focusing her analysis on female writers of the genre, has selected these same texts by Sarraute and Duras and adds two others, Maryse Condé's *Heremakhonon* and Monique Wittig's *Across the Acheron* to the group.

3. Plato, in his *Symposium*, retraces the first image in mythology of a human being created by Zeus. This human had four arms, four legs, two faces and a common head. Zeus, angered by the rebellion of this human, cut "it" into two, condemning the two halves to continually search for each other to try to recreate the original state of fusion.

4. Margaret-Anne Hutton, in her recent book *The Novels of Christiane Rochefort: Countering the Culture* (1998), provides a compelling analysis in a lengthy chapter devoted to this novel. In addition, Hutton has published numerous articles, one of which is "Assuming Responsibility: Christiane Rochefort's Exploration of Child Sexual Abuse in *La Porte du fond*." A number of other articles have appeared, including those published by Diana Holmes, Micheline Herez, and Henri-François Rey.

5. These three texts were, in fact, omitted entirely from the only book-length analysis of Rochefort's work, Margaret-Anne Hutton's *The Novels of Christiane Rochefort: Countering the Culture* (1998). In her book Hutton refers to *Le Monde est comme deux chevaux* as a "hybrid text which is both a fable, an analysis of current affairs, . . . and a rather hermetic commentary on diverse subjects. (3) She excludes *Adieu Andromède* as "a collection of poems." (3) And, *Conversations sans paroles*, she explains, is "a very brief first-person narrative which touches upon motherhood, mortality, and the natural world and its destruction at the hands of mankind, but which focuses primarily upon the eponymous 'conversations with out words,' or extra-linguistic forms of communication, is also an autobiographical work which has consequently been omitted." (3)

6. For Freud the double is one manifestation of the uncanny, or the *unheimlich*. He explains the uncanny as related to that which arouses dread and horror: "the uncanny

is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." ("The Uncanny," 220) It is characterized by ambivalence, by the coexistence of the familiar, the *heimlich*, and the unfamiliar, the *unheimlich*. In his essay, Freud also relates Hoffman's story *Nachtstücken*, in which the figure of the Sand-Man, feared for tearing out children's eyes, is representative of the dread associated with the uncanny. He states, "I think, that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes. . . ." (230)

Freud extends his interpretation of the figure of the Sand-Man and the uncanny to include his study of dreams and fantasies and the fear of castration: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration. . . ." (231)

On the figure of the double, Freud comments that, "the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing -- the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names. . . ." (234)

It is the factor of repetition, or the recurrence of something repressed, that imposes the idea of something fateful and inescapable and leads to a sense of the uncanny (237). He further asserts that the double can function as observer or critic of the self, as a kind of censor within the mind that we become aware of as our "conscience." (235)

In this same essay, Freud also notes the thorough work on the theme of the double published in 1914 by Otto Rank. In Rank's study the figure of the double is connected to reflections in mirrors, shadows, guardian spirits, as well as the opposing images of the soul as preservation against extinction and the soul as harbinger of death.

7. This metaphor recurs several times, six in fact, during the course of the narrative. It appears first on page 33, in reference to the whip that Macha has inserted in his rear, "J'avais un *cocktail*." It appears a second time on page 39, in reference to the reaction he imagines in the mind of those who see him with this odd appendage, "C'est un *cocktail* littéraire, bien qu'un peu fermé vu la nature particulière de l'ouvrage fêté. Je reconnais bientôt quelques autres compagnons de souffrances." It comes up again on page 132, as Gilles-Henri reads a passage from an article in a right-wing paper about the audacity of sexual deviants: "Ils ne se cachent même plus, tel était le titre de l'article paru dans une feuille d'extrême droite. 'Un professeur gauchiste -- de ceux qui ont mission de former notre jeunesse - s'exhibe à un *cocktail littéraire* dans un attirail complet de pervers. . . ." With degradation directed toward figures of authority, three young people dressed in SS uniforms, the narrator relates, on page 160, that they "furent servis en *shrimp-cocktail* qui ruina leurs beaux habits et leur autorité, plus rien ne tenait c'était l'inversion." On page 189, Ferdinand Kuntz-Lopez, an architect of modern structures (for which Rochefort

has many times expressed intense dislike), gets his due in a news item published after the completion of a new project. The narrator relates, "Ferdinand Kuntz-Lopez reçut sa correction pour de bon publique au cocktail d'inauguration de son nouveau complexe super-luxe. . . ." He was attacked by a group of young thugs who stripped off his pants, whipped him, and left him publicly displayed with his legs and rear exposed. A photographer captured the sight and the newspaper printed it. A final use of the metaphor, on page 193, refers again to the first use of the metaphor. The narrator contemplates a group of photographs now displayed on his refrigerator door representing each of his "faces intéressantes." The first of these photographs is "l'inaugurale, au cocktail."

8. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung explains that the shadow is a kind of second self that corresponds to the unconscious life of the psyche. It is the negative side of the personality, a sum of all the unpleasant or undesirable qualities the conscious self wishes to hide. One aspect of the working of the shadow is the confrontation of projections or doubles that reflect one's own inner self. Set in opposition to the conscious self, it presents itself a powerful, usually threatening reversal of that consciousness. Jung further indicates that the guilt created by the existence of this negative shadow is sometimes dealt with through divine mediation, Catholic confession and absolution, for example. But not everyone is religious, and these, as are often portrayed in literature, are left to experience their sense of guilt by "seeing" themselves as tortured victims, martyrs in the tradition of Christ bearing the cross. "I wish everybody could be freed from the burden of their sins by the Church," Jung comments, "but he to whom she cannot render this service must bend very low in the imitation of Christ in order to take the burden of his cross upon him." (281)

9. Rochefort's choice of this name alludes to Luis Buñuel's 1962 surrealist film, *El Ángel Exterminador* in which guests at a dinner party find that they are unable to leave the table. Here, as is often the case in Buñuel's films, the director comments with satirical wit and stark realism on the nature of the civilized world. His characters find themselves in an absurd situation and, unable to come to terms with their own human nature, experience a breakdown of traditional order. The film is an exploration of Buñuel's idea that human beings often seek to deny their animal nature through the creation of civilized codes and manners. Another reference is made to this figure in Rochefort's novel *La Porte du fond*. As the narrator blocks in her mind the play that she is in the process of writing (a play bearing the same name as the novel in which the narrator herself is the principal voice or character), she plans for the audience to be left in a prolonged period of silent blackness before the final lowering of the curtain. With regard to that gesture, she comments, "Je me suis interrogée s'ils allaient rester collés à leurs fauteuils et ma mémoire reçut la visite de L'Ange exterminateur, celui de Buñuel (pour qui l'aurait manqué: les invités de la réception haut-bourgeoise se voient, au moment du départ, dans l'impossibilité physique de franchir les portes pourtant ouvertes; s'ensuivent des journées d'horreur, toute leur merde cachée qui sort). J'eus le temps de me demander comment ils (les nôtres) allaient se débrouiller pour les chiottes." (150)

10. Sidonie Smith points out that "However feminist theorists conceptualize difference, they all recognize woman's double bind: 'As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But if they begin to speak and write *as men do*, they will enter history subdued and alienated.' Thus any 'arachnology,' to refer to Nancy K. Miller's name for a theory of female textuality, must grapple with the formal constrictions and rhetorical presentations, the historical context and psychosexual labyrinth, the subversions and the capitulations of woman's self-writing in a patriarchal culture that 'fictionalizes' her." Smith notes her sources as Xavière Gauthier's essay "Existe-t-il une écriture de femme?" published in *New French Feminisms* and Nancy K. Miller's essay "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic" published as a chapter of her book, *The Poetics of Gender*.

11. Another instance occurs in *La Porte du fond*, for example, when the narrator confesses, "bon dieu il y avait longtemps que mon vase sacré (anatomiquement l'image est un peu à côté mais le résultat est le même) était banalisé, à force d'utilisation objectale et sans permis. Pour user d'un langage précis et scientifique." (99)

12. The quote, which is their translation, is taken from "K filosofii postupka" [Toward a philosophy of the act] in the 1984-85 issue of *Filosofia i sotsiologiya nauki i tekhniki*, a yearbook of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Moscow: Nauka, 1986, 80-160.



## CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the functioning of voice in narrative is imperative, not only to discerning meaning within a text, but to appreciating the complexity and subtlety of the writer's art. Voice was an essential structural element that Christiane Rochefort applied in her writing; therefore, a study of its different manifestations in her work is particularly appropriate. Literary awards (*Prix de la Nouvelle Vague* in 1958 and *Prix du Roman Populiste* in 1961, for example) distinguished her early fiction as thematically significant. By comparison, a relative paucity of published scholarly analysis exists referencing her later work. This study extends the existing body of critical analysis surrounding Rochefort's fiction with new readings of the writer's later work and scholarly analysis of several texts which, until now have remained obscure, misunderstood, and under appreciated. In addition, this dissertation proposes Rochefort's later narratives as examples of a recent trend toward hybridization of the novelistic genre into what has been labeled autofiction.

The similarity between Rochefort's work and the description given by the Swedish Academy of the work of this year's Nobel laureate, Gao Xingjiang, is particularly striking. The work of this Chinese dissident was noted by the Academy for the "bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity" in his writings about the "struggle for individuality in mass culture." These words equally characterize Christiane Rochefort's work as a dissident voice in protest against centers of authority in post

World War II France. Her writing is linguistically innovative and ironically critical of socio-economic, psychological and textual norms. In her texts, voice functions as the fundamental vehicle through which that human struggle is represented. Through the complexity and dialogic interaction of these voices, the writer is able to create narrative tension as she examines and questions human relationships within the context of family and contemporary society.

Noting that Rochefort's fiction is compatible with Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the novel as the intersection of diverse individual voices and social speech types, this study draws particular support from Bakhtinian theory and terminology. Both novelist and theorist envision the novel as a dialogic and polyphonic complex of voices within a social, historical, and cultural context. Bakhtinian theory provides a wealth of terms by which discourse and the voices within it can be examined. At the base of this terminology is Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. Broadly speaking, the term heteroglossia refers to the existence of multiple voices that come together in different ways, for different purposes, and with different results within the context of written narrative. Heteroglossia manifests itself in narrative at several levels: at the level of the multiple voices in dialogue with one another within the text; at the level of the text as it relates to other texts; and at the level of the various voices that may be present simultaneously in the speech of a single character within the text. One result of this multiplicity and layering of voices is that novels tend to have several centers of authority, or intention, which are typically in conflict, or in tension, with one another.

Also fundamental to Bakhtian theory is the concept of carnival. Carnival arises from the populace as a voice of derision that seeks to appropriate the forbidden and to abolish existing hierarchies. This voice of mockery, ambivalence, and reversal rejects existing structures of authority or intention in favor of multiple voices of conflict and tension. Rochefort's fiction, marked by carnivalesque language and attitude, at times seeks to shock the reader in a foregrounding of the grotesque. Morphological and syntactical transgressions in her writing testify to her imagination, her comic sense, and her creative talent. Carnavalesque visions of utopia motivate a number of her novels.

The title of this dissertation, "Christiane Rochefort and the Dialogic: Voices of Tension and Intention," not only associates Rochefort's work with Bakhtinian dialogics, it points to the significance of intention in textual voices and to tension created as a result of their constant interaction. Intention suggests purpose, point of view, direction, and persuasion or seduction. It is inherently conflicted in that it anticipates response. Tension implies resistance, conflict, complexity, and ambiguity or indecision. Tension and intention, then, work together to break open linear narratives and force the reader to question. Rochefort's fictional corpus seems expressly designed to question and challenge the status quo and, in so doing, suggest other ways of seeing, of behaving, of being. As Rochefort's work evolves, becoming more subversively carnivalesque, the relationship between the forces of tension and intention becomes increasingly complex. Intention becomes more difficult to discern due to the plurality of voices and to the increasing ambiguity surrounding them. Voices of intention become voices "in" tension.

For purposes of this study, Rochefort's work is divided into three groups in order to trace its thematic and stylistic development. Analysis of the textual voices and their associated discourse also necessarily brings into account the context in which those voices resound. Rochefort's fiction covers a period of some forty years during the latter half of the twentieth century. The first group of novels is set in post-World War II French society, a time of economic restructuring and emerging capitalist materialism and consumerism. Each of the three novels in this group deals with essentially the same theme by articulating or *voicing*, from three different individual *female* perspectives, the tensions existing within and between different levels of French society during those years of rapid social and economic change. Although labeled "innocent" by the writer, these novels are stylistically complex and seeded with elements that are more fully developed in Rochefort's mature fiction. Already in evidence are: splitting and shifting of the narrative voice; heteroglossic layering and parodying; doubling; varying levels of languages; *mise-en-abyme* or embedding; intertextuality; and metatextual commentary--all of which expose mechanisms of power.

In Rochefort's first novel, *Le Repos du guerrier*, a young bourgeois woman becomes disillusioned after falling in love with a bohemian male who cynically mocks her superficial values and pre-patterned lifestyle. In the second, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, an adolescent girl from one of Paris' newly constructed *habitations à loyer modéré* sarcastically observes lifestyles and attitudes among the financially beleaguered inhabitants of these enormous architectural structures. In the third, *Les Stances à Sophie*, a young bohemian woman marries into a bourgeois family where

she feels manipulated by controlling attitudes and discourses that would transform her and force her to conform to a lifestyle that she comes to view as shallow and void of meaning.

Rocheport's second cycle of novels evidences a shift in both thematic interest and narrative style. The novels are characterized by increasing ambiguity surrounding the voices, by anonymity and stylization of the characters, and by the incorporation of dream elements and fantasy. As a result of these changes, determinations involving voice become more problematic. Voices in these novels reflect group dynamics and emanate from those sectors of society that the writer viewed as dominated or marginalized in some way. Set in post-1968 France, the voices underline a moment in society when the individual was superseded by the mass. Rebellious groups dreamed of a better society and aspired to different roles for themselves within it. Particular groups whose voices figure prominently in these novels include youths (of both elementary and university age) and homosexuals. Subversion at the thematic level is duplicated stylistically by the inclusion of numerous undesignated voices and in the linguistic novelty of their speech. From the voices of intention in Rocheport's early novels, these later texts produce heterogeneous groups of voices in tension. Although utopian ideals motivate these narratives, issues of identity and individual self-determination remain fundamental themes.

Rocheport's final group of texts, those novels published between 1982 and 1997, manifest a return to first-person perspective and focus again on the plight of the individual. Still at issue are concerns of self and identity, this time tinged with

preoccupation with death and fascination for the act of writing as extension and preservation of self. Tension among the voices continues to arise from issues of gender and sexuality. It is not sexual activity, however, but sexually determined identity that is central to these texts. Further tension derives from heteroglossic layering of voices in both direct and indirect discourse as well as from movement between the two forms of speech. Other factors that contribute to the creation of narrative tension include: ambiguity due to juxtaposition of metaphorical, fantasmagorical and mimetic figurations of reality; dialogic exchange among textual and intertextual voices; and the hybrid structure of the texts themselves.

These autofictional texts set up tension by calling into question considerations of authenticity and intentionality, exhibiting acute awareness of the social and political dimensions in which self and text are produced. This group of Rochefortian fictions is especially attentive to the connectedness between self and the world. The fictional voices in these texts continue to raise issues of subjectivity and gender as personal text and historical context intersect. These novelistic hybrids, by refusing pre-existing stylistic and structural guidelines, stylistically parallel the breakdown of social, political, and even geographical categorizations of humanity in post-colonial twentieth-century cultures.

Thematically, Rochefort's fictional corpus offers insights into the effects of political, economic, and other cultural influences on the personal lives of French citizens. Absent from Rochefort's fiction is any evidence of emotion, pity or pathos. Rather, her novels are an intellectual examination and interrogation of subtle mechanisms of control. Often in the language of the proletariat, they express scorn,

mistrust, and mocking sarcasm. Yet, through the din of voices, the novels consistently reveal unflagging belief in the value of the individual, concern for her/his condition, and make a spirited appeal for the right to be different. Also fundamental to Rochefort's fiction are issues germane to politics of relationships and questions of identity, all of which are inextricably linked to intricacies and subtleties of language. As language and culture continue to evolve, and as individuals and collectivities struggle to comprehend the world and their places in it, Christiane Rochefort's writing will remain relevant. When readers approach Rochefort's fiction by focusing on the intention of the narrative voices and the tensions resulting from the dialogic interaction of those voices, deeper and more complex meanings will be derived.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pamela Paine grew up in Okaloosa county, Florida where she graduated from Choctawhatchee High School in 1962. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in French from Florida State University in 1966. During her years as a university student, she lived during the summers with her family in Châteauroux, France and participated in French language programs at the Université de Poitiers in Tours, France.

After graduating from the university, she married James Robert Paine in the summer of 1966. They had two children, Christine Leigh and James Robert, Jr. During the years between 1966 and 1992, Pamela taught French and English in high schools in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, areas where her family lived. As a high school teacher, she organized student tours of France, England and Spain. She also participated in French language seminars at the Université Laval in Quebec.

In 1993, Pamela began advanced studies in French at Auburn University as a teaching assistant. While a student at Auburn University, she lived and studied for one semester at the Institut Universitaire pour la Formation de Maîtres in Caen, France. She received her Master of Arts in French in 1995. She then began doctoral studies at the University of Florida, where she also worked as a teaching assistant, and completed her qualifying examinations in the spring of 1998.

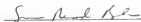
Since that time, she has taught French at Auburn University where she is currently coordinator of first year French studies.

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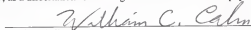
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Susan Read Baker  
Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures

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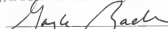
William Calin  
Graduate Research Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures

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R. Brandon Kershner  
Professor of English

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Gayle Zachmann  
Assistant Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 2000

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Winfred M. Phillips  
Dean, Graduate School

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